

斐德希克·德波米

Frédéric Debomy

柳廣成

Lau Kwong-Shing

緬甸  
取後  
搏

Myanmar,

the last stand

中譯 許惇純

英譯 Alice Heathwood



~~SAVE~~

NO MORE  
MURDER

G D M

G D M

G R M

PLEASE!!

FREEDOM



We Want  
mo cracy



# Focus

## Myanmar

A former British colony, Myanmar, also known as Burma, gained independence in 1948. The brief period of democracy which ensued was cut short in 1962 when Burmese army General Ne Win staged a coup, establishing military rule that has since dominated the country. For decades, the Burmese army has faced resistance from armed groups issuing from the country's various minorities, which represent approximately one third of its population.

## Aung San Suu Kyi

Born in 1945, she co-founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 1988. While her party won the general election in 1990, the army refused to recognise the results and she was condemned to spend the bulk of the next two decades under military house arrest.

## Min Aung Hlaing

General Min Aung Hlaing became Commander-in-chief of the Burmese army in 2011, following in the footsteps of military rulers like Ne Win (1962-1988) and Than Shwe (1992-2011). Min Aung Hlaing was the chief instigator behind the February 1, 2021 coup that ended the semi-democratic period of the preceding years.

## **The 1988 uprising**

In 1987, dictator Ne Win demonetised certain bank notes (25, 35 and 75 kyat bills), plunging struggling households into further financial distress. The anti-government protests sparked by demonetisation gathered impetus following the death of a student killed by riot police. On August 8, 1988, hundreds of thousands of people protested across the country. Between March and September of that year, at least 3000 protesters were reported to have been killed.

## **The Saffron Revolution**

On August 15, 2007 the junta abruptly raised fuel prices, sparking protests led first by activists, then later by monks. The movement attracted international media attention before it was quashed by the military in early October.

## **The November 7, 2010 general election**

The NLD's refusal to take part in the electoral masquerade delegitimised the army's claims of democratisation and forced the military to relax its political stranglehold in order to maintain a veneer of credibility. After landside victories at both the 2012 by-election and the 2015 general election, the NLD went on to form government in 2016.

## **The November 8, 2020 general election**

the NLD won this election by a landslide (taking 920 out of 1117 seats in local and national parliaments), while the military backed party won only 71 seats. The result spurred Min Aung Hlaing and his accomplices to execute a coup d'etat on February 1, 2021, and imprison Aung San Suu Kyi.

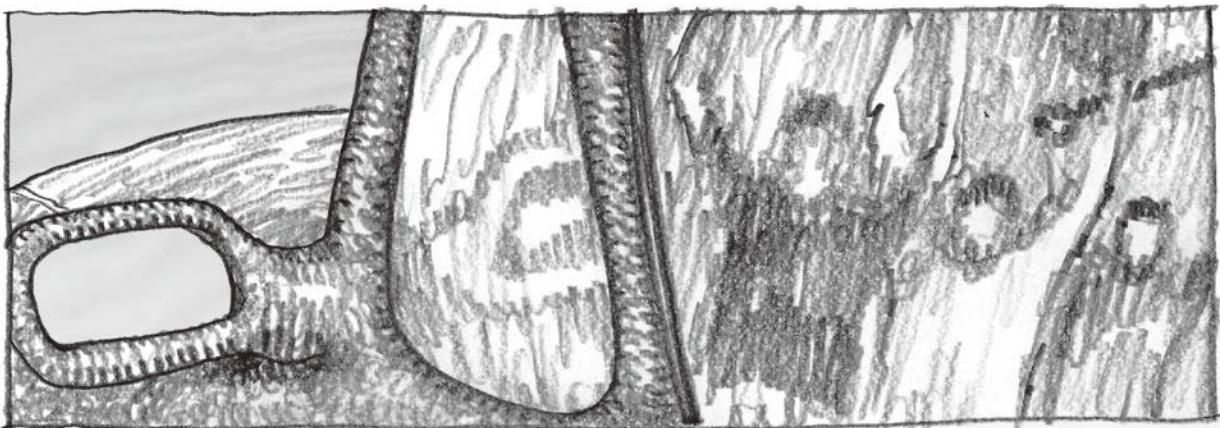
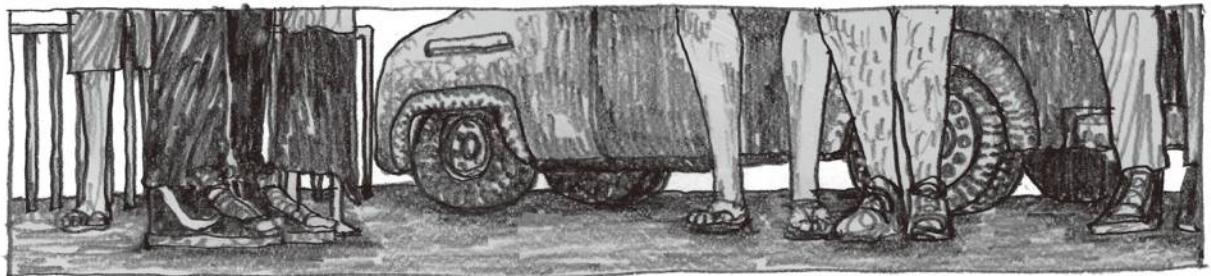
Both the English and Mandarin in this book are translated from the original text in French.

細面角

~~日取後~~

捕

"Min Aung Hlaing, I hate you more than my periods!"



February 2021

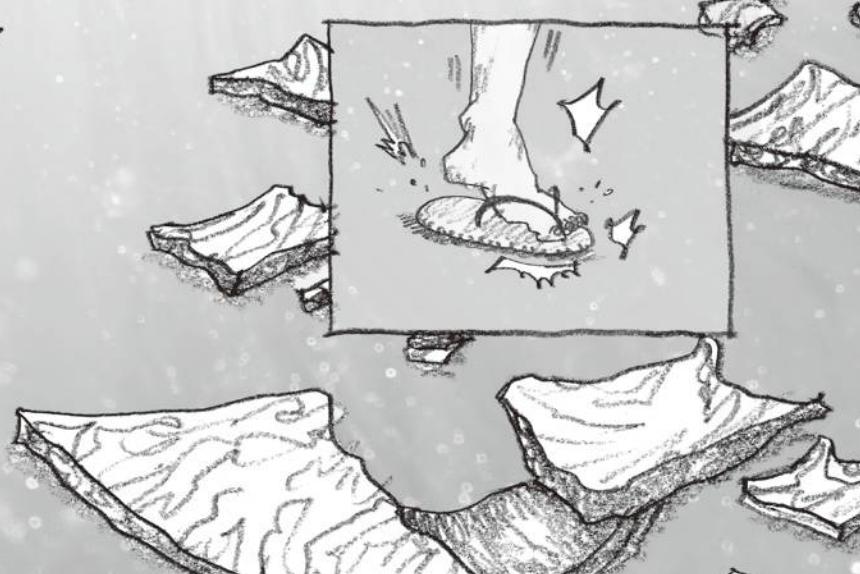


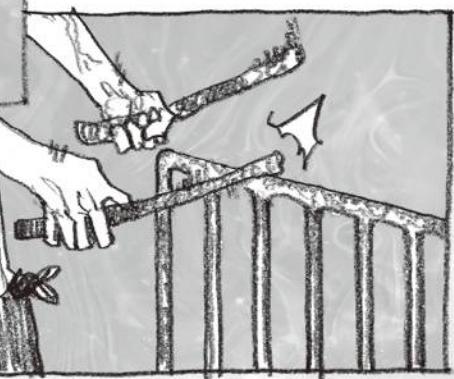
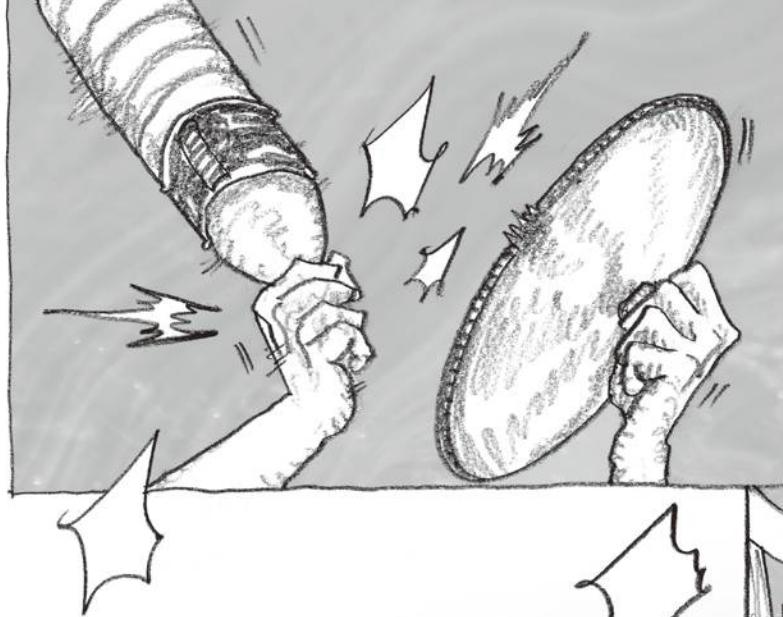


The Burmese army ceased sharing power with democratic authorities, citing irregularities at the November 2020 elections. This ended a period of semi-democracy that had lasted just a few short years. Full military dictatorship was back.



The next day, people began  
banging on pots and pans and  
railings.



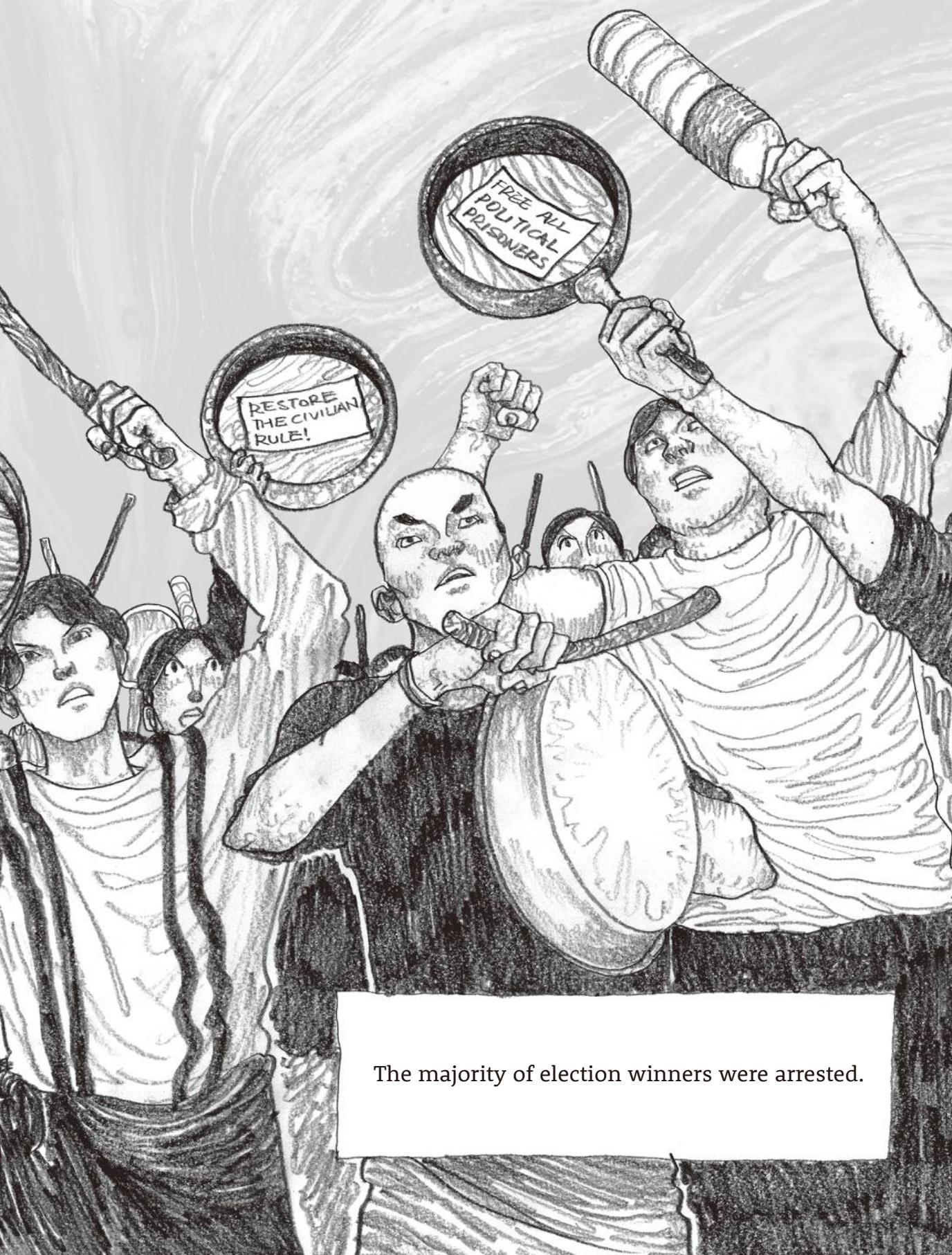


A traditional method of warding off  
evil spirits.





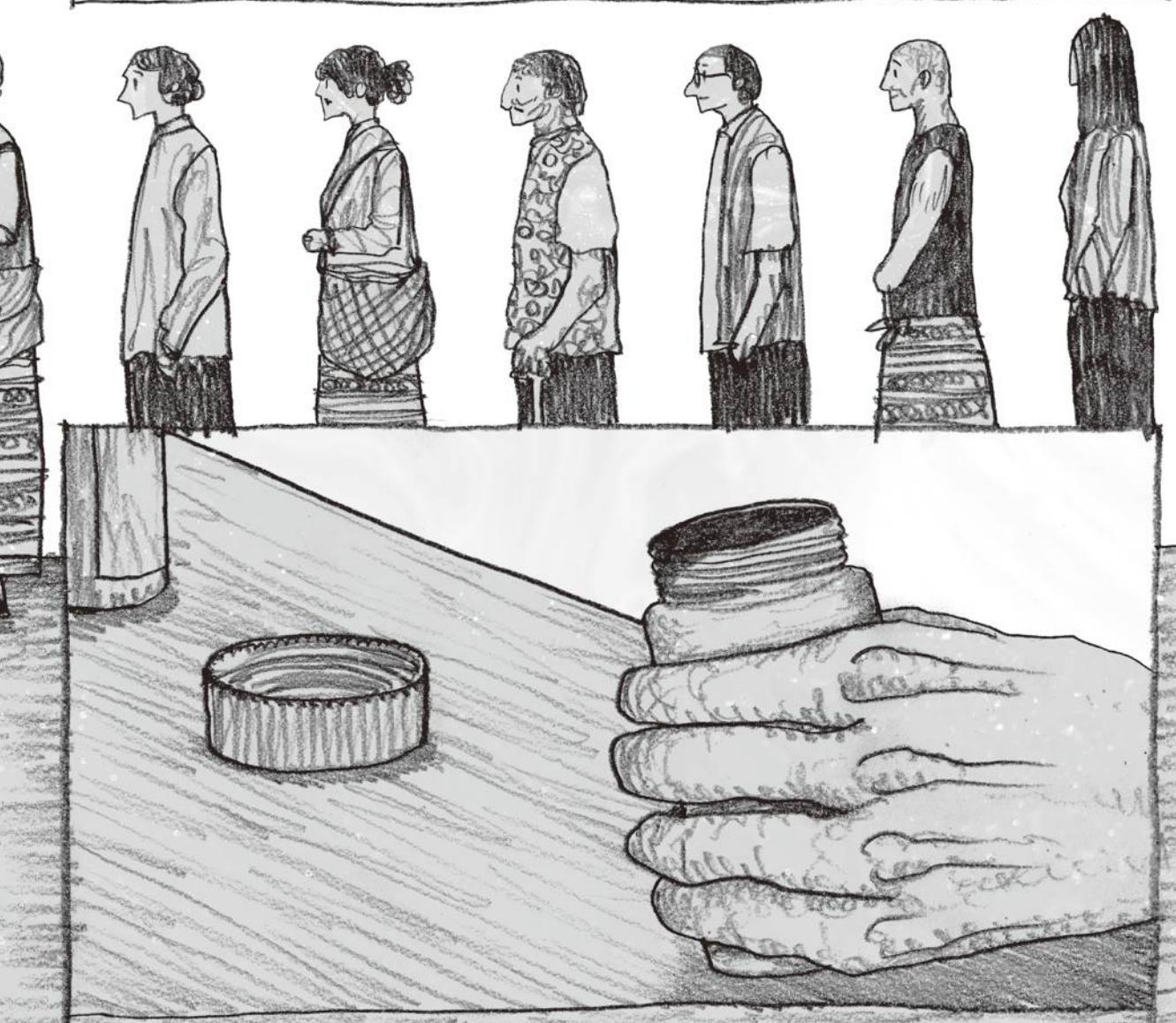
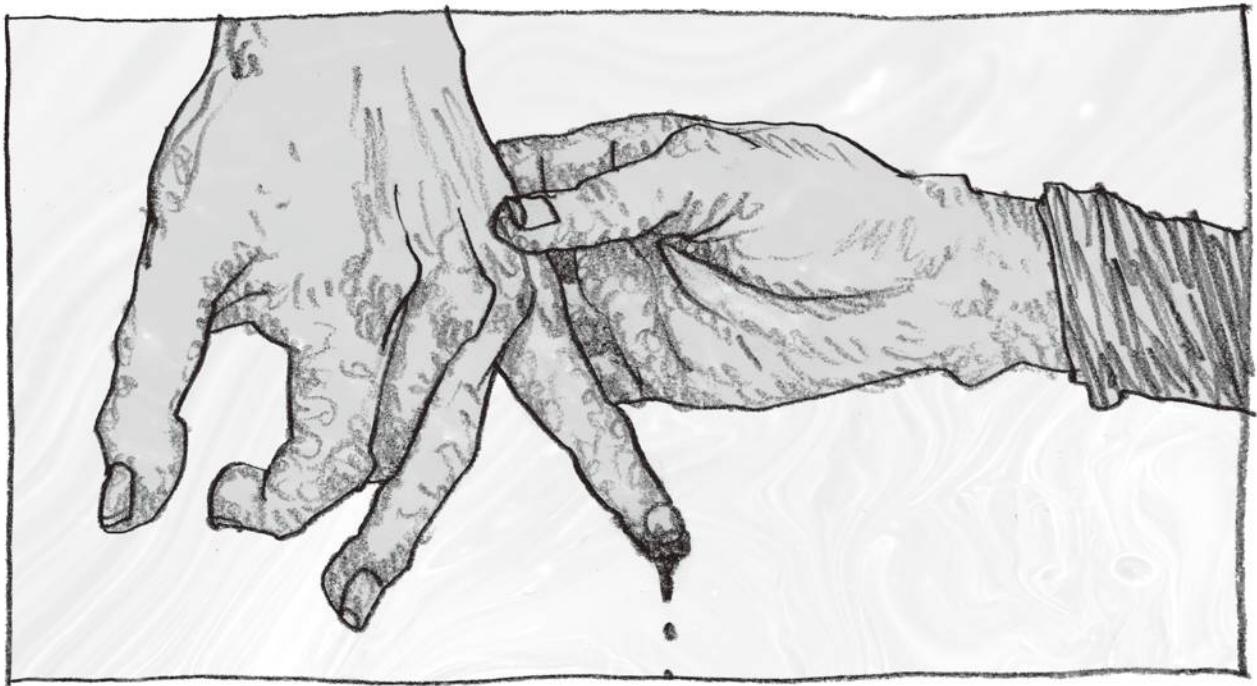
FREE  
ALL  
POLITICAL  
PRISONERS



The majority of election winners were arrested.

In November 2020, many young voters photographed themselves leaving polling stations, one finger stained with ink: a sign that they had voted.







They were proud. Their votes had just been stolen.

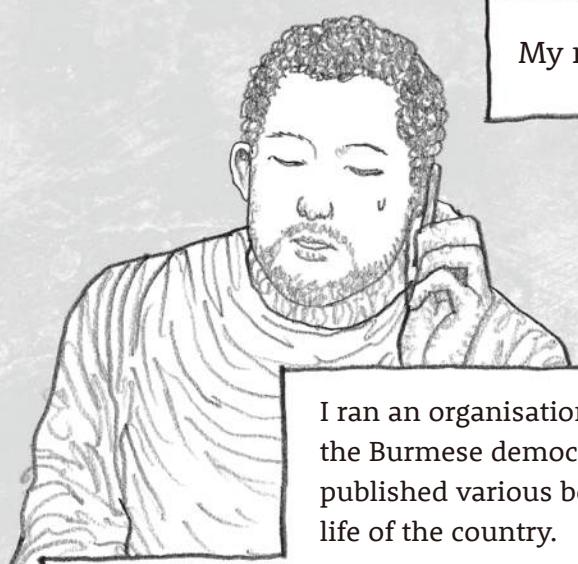


Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested on February 1st. She's out of the game.



She could get up to three years in prison for illegal possession of walkie-talkies.

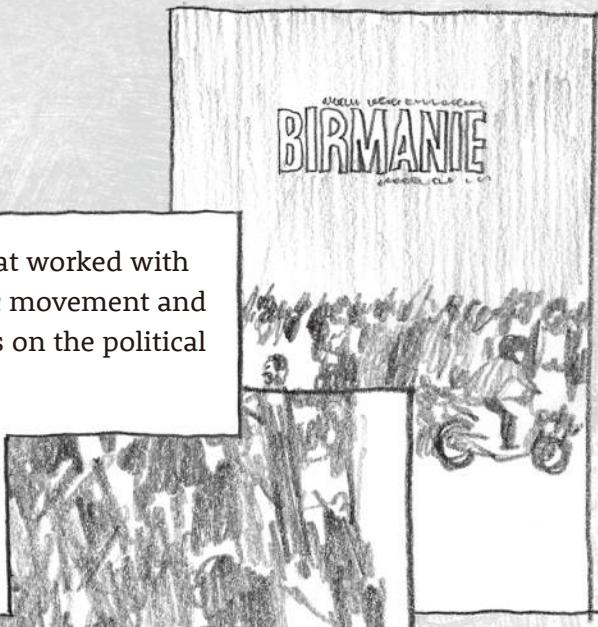
Yes, it's absurd, but that's what they came up with.



My name is Frédéric Debomy.

I ran an organisation that worked with the Burmese democratic movement and published various books on the political life of the country.

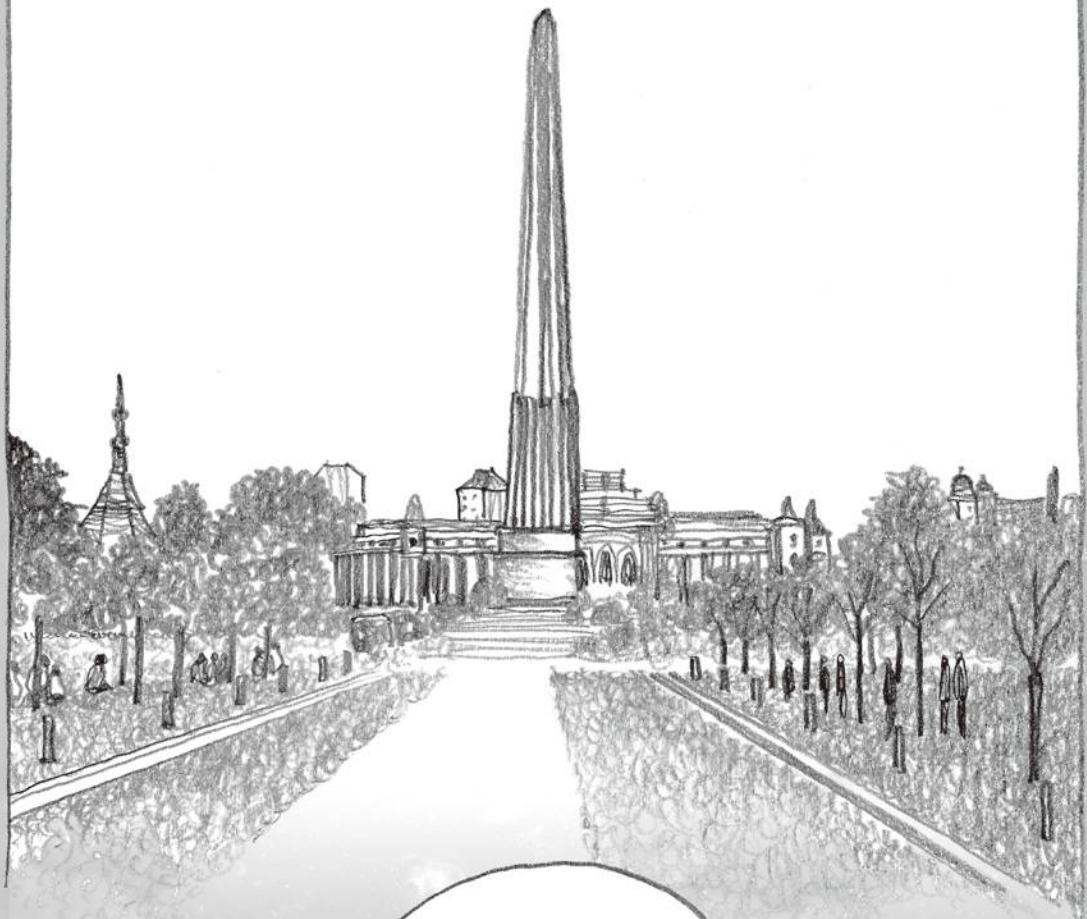
Since the military coup on February 1st, 2021, I've been fielding questions from reporters from France, Belgium and Switzerland.



In those countries, my name is one of the few associated with Myanmar.



I'm deeply sorry that this period of semi-democracy has come to an end for the Burmese people.



“I liked seeing people walk freely through the park.”

Before there  
was nothing:

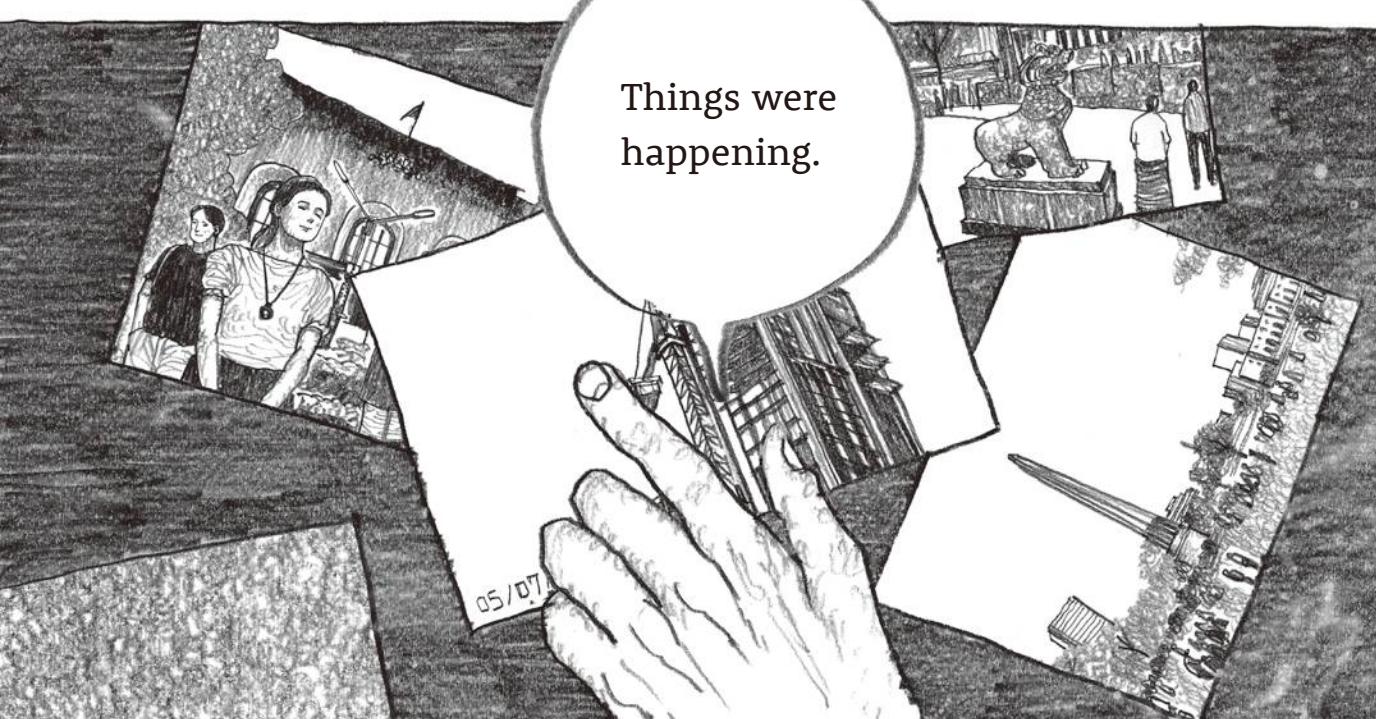
no exhibitions, no  
community stands,  
no concerts...

Then all of a sudden  
there was more  
going on, more life.

04/05/2020



Buildings popped up everywhere.  
Shopping centres,  
big apartment complexes...



Things were happening.

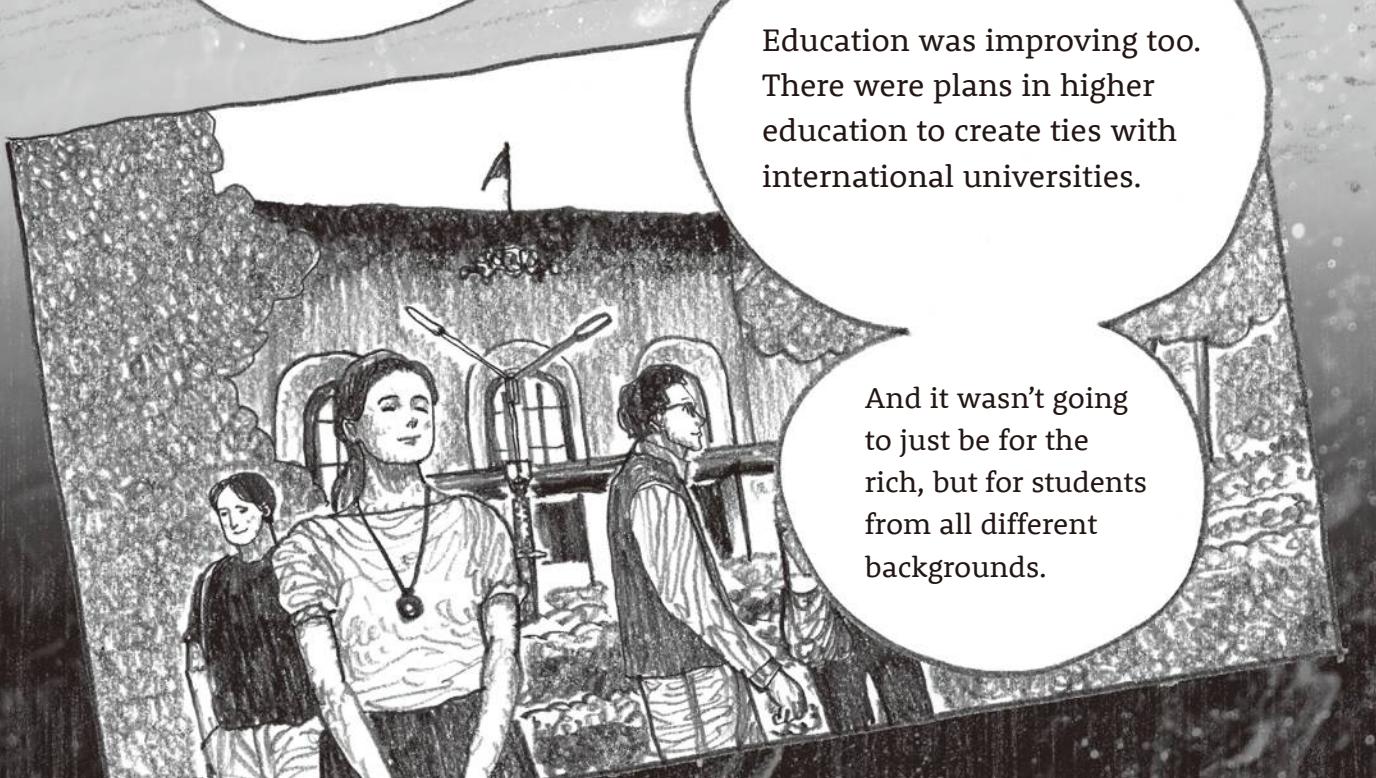


There were still major problems. In Rakhine State in the west, the army was massacring Rohingya muslims,

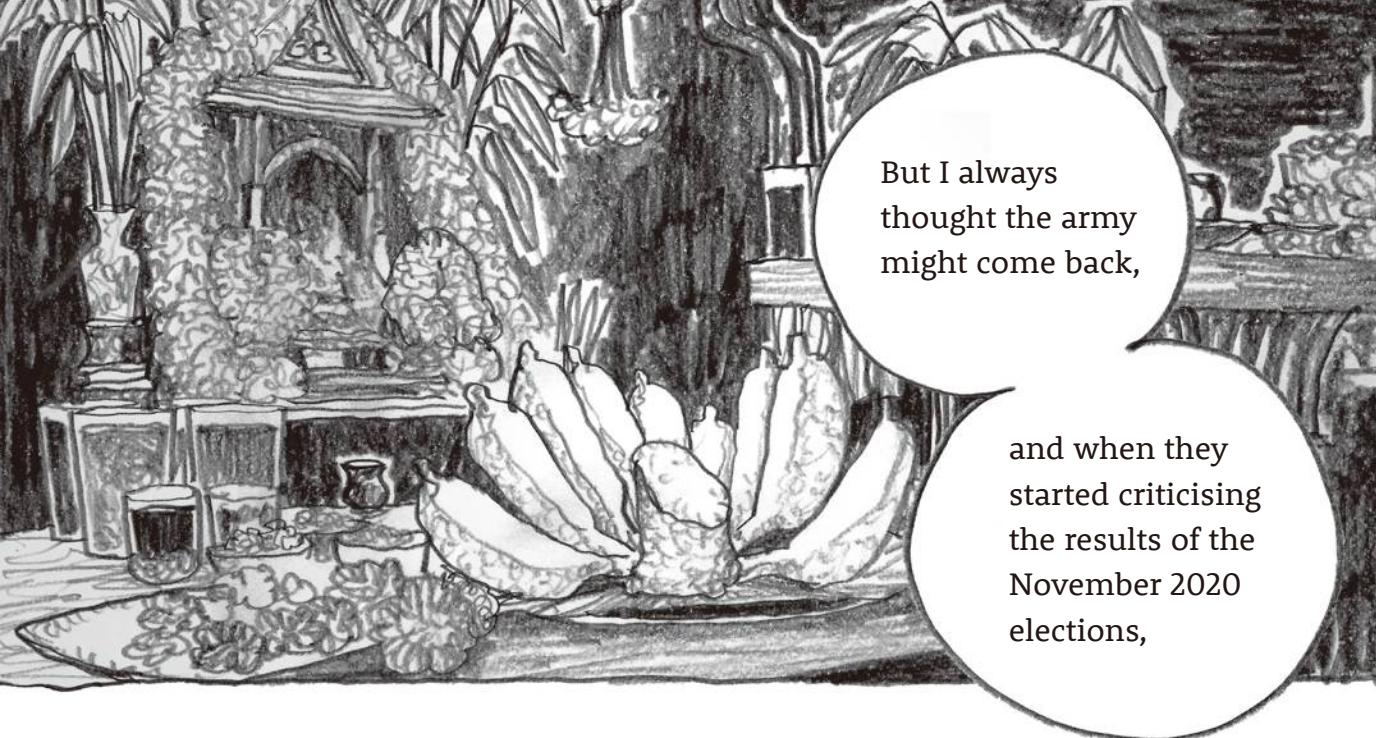
but for many of us, it was the first time we'd experienced such freedom.

We had more access to the rest of the world, communication was no longer blocked. When the army allowed the National League for Democracy to form government in 2016, we gained a kind of freedom of expression we had never known.

Education was improving too. There were plans in higher education to create ties with international universities.



And it wasn't going to just be for the rich, but for students from all different backgrounds.



But I always  
thought the army  
might come back,



after the National  
League for Democracy  
won, talking of fraud  
that never happened, I  
was worried.



I believe once  
people get a taste  
for power, they  
always want more.



That morning, my colleague called me around 6am, to tell me there had been a coup. I didn't want to believe it.

But despite my shock,  
I knew it was true.

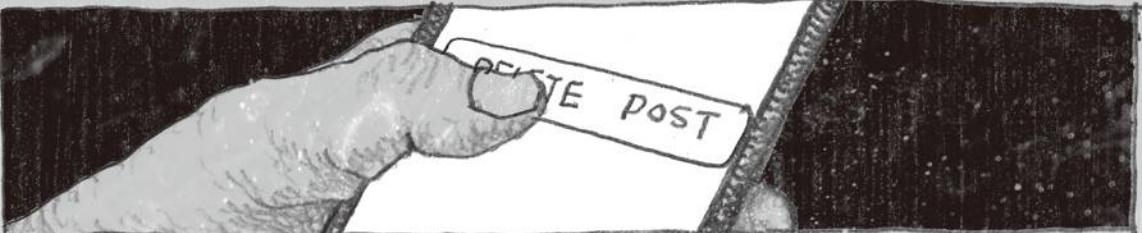


Immediately,

I deleted all “sensitive” posts from my various social media accounts,



because my first thought was the for safety of my family.

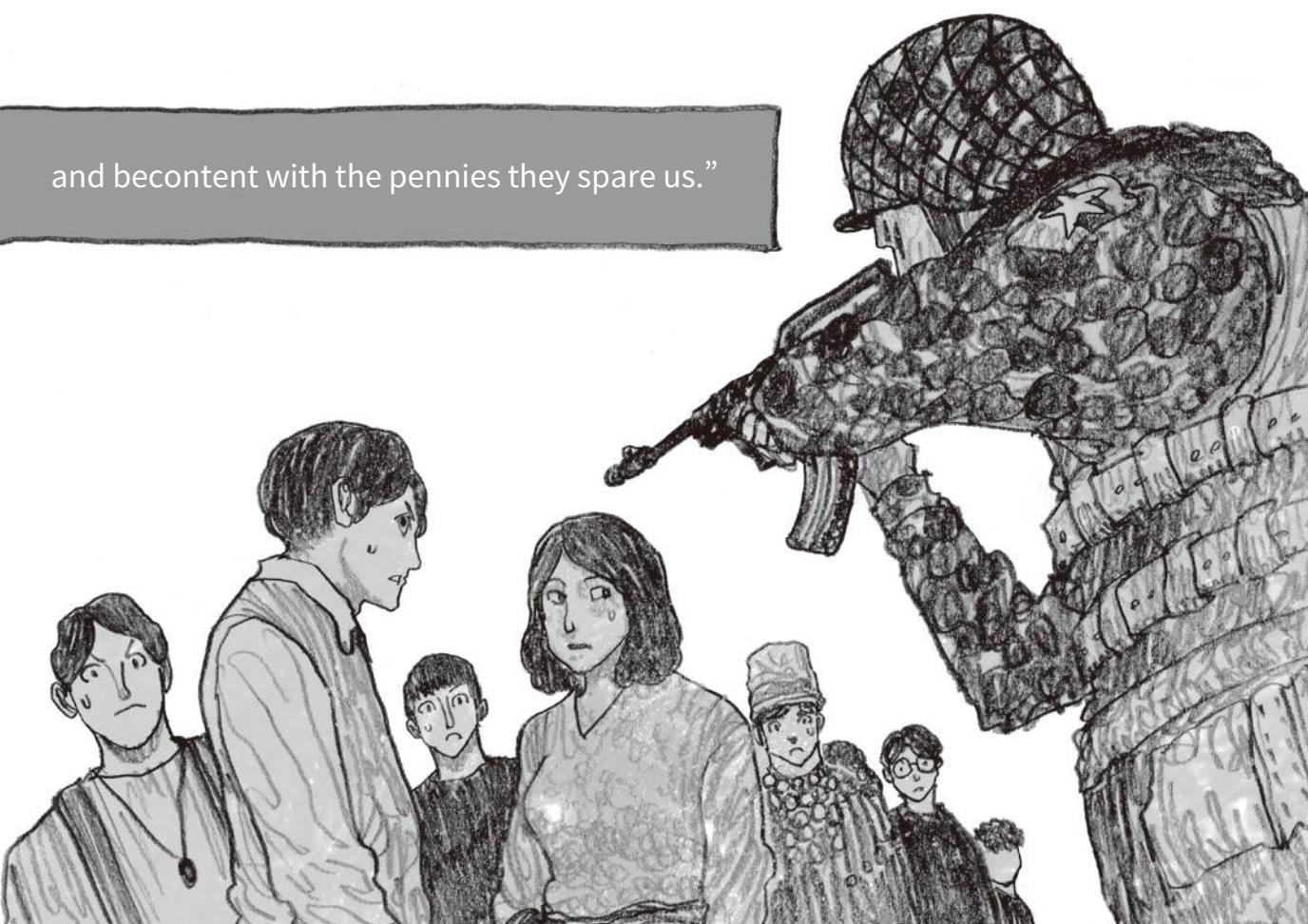


DELETE POST



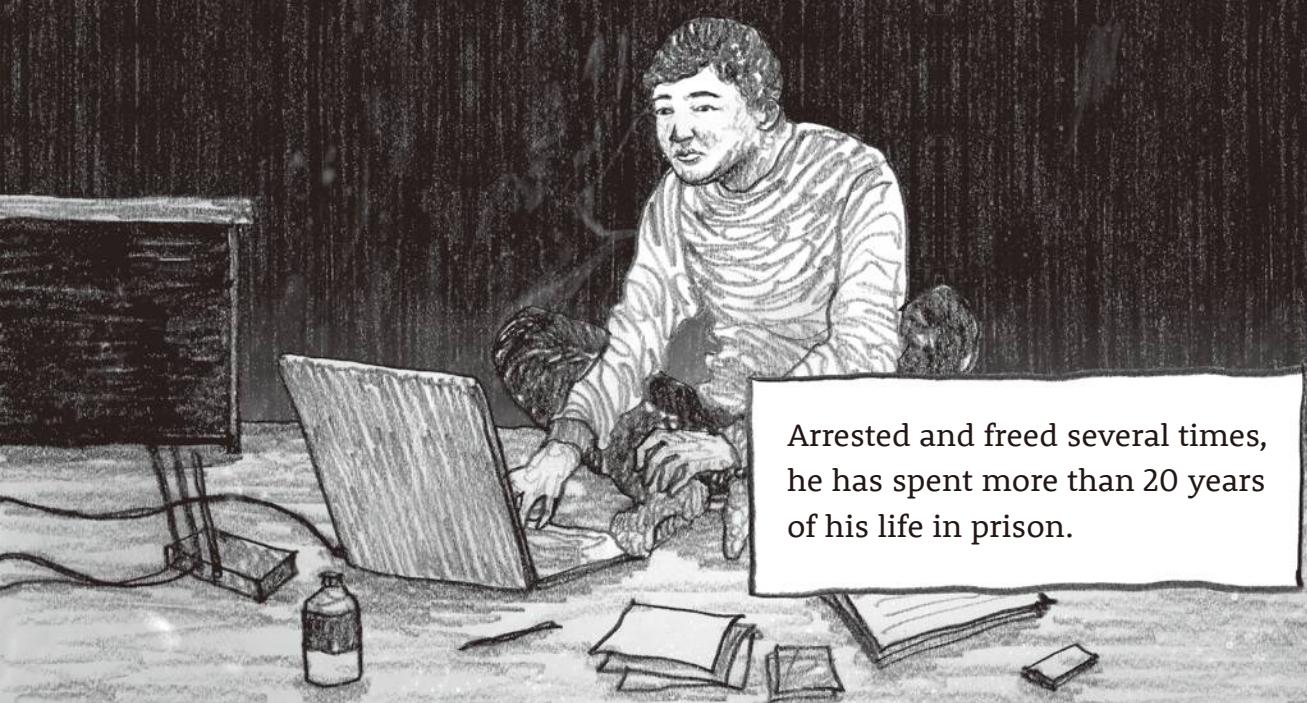
“We can no longer be slaves of military dictators,

and be content with the pennies they spare us.”



Hunted by the army, Min Ko Naing lives in hiding.

He is one of the best known figures of the pro-democracy movement. In 1988, he helped lead protests that lasted several months before a brutal and bloody repression. In 2007, along with other veterans of the 1988 uprising, he launched a new protest movement against the military dictatorship before being once again thrown in prison. The movement was taken up by monks opposing military rule, who led the “Saffron revolution” until it was eventually quashed.



Arrested and freed several times, he has spent more than 20 years of his life in prison.

But now he's back. And it feels as if history is repeating.



But this time his strategy is different. It's no longer about organising marches. Now, he and other activists are calling on government employees to strike and on everyone to boycott products sold by military-owned companies.

Healthcare workers were the first to respond to calls for civil disobedience.

We want our patients to know that we are not striking because we don't want to treat people,

We are striking against the coup d'état to help our patients, because we don't want a repeat of the old nightmare under military rule when we lost patients because there wasn't enough medicine or medical equipment.

Increasing numbers of government employees are trying to block the military from ruling.

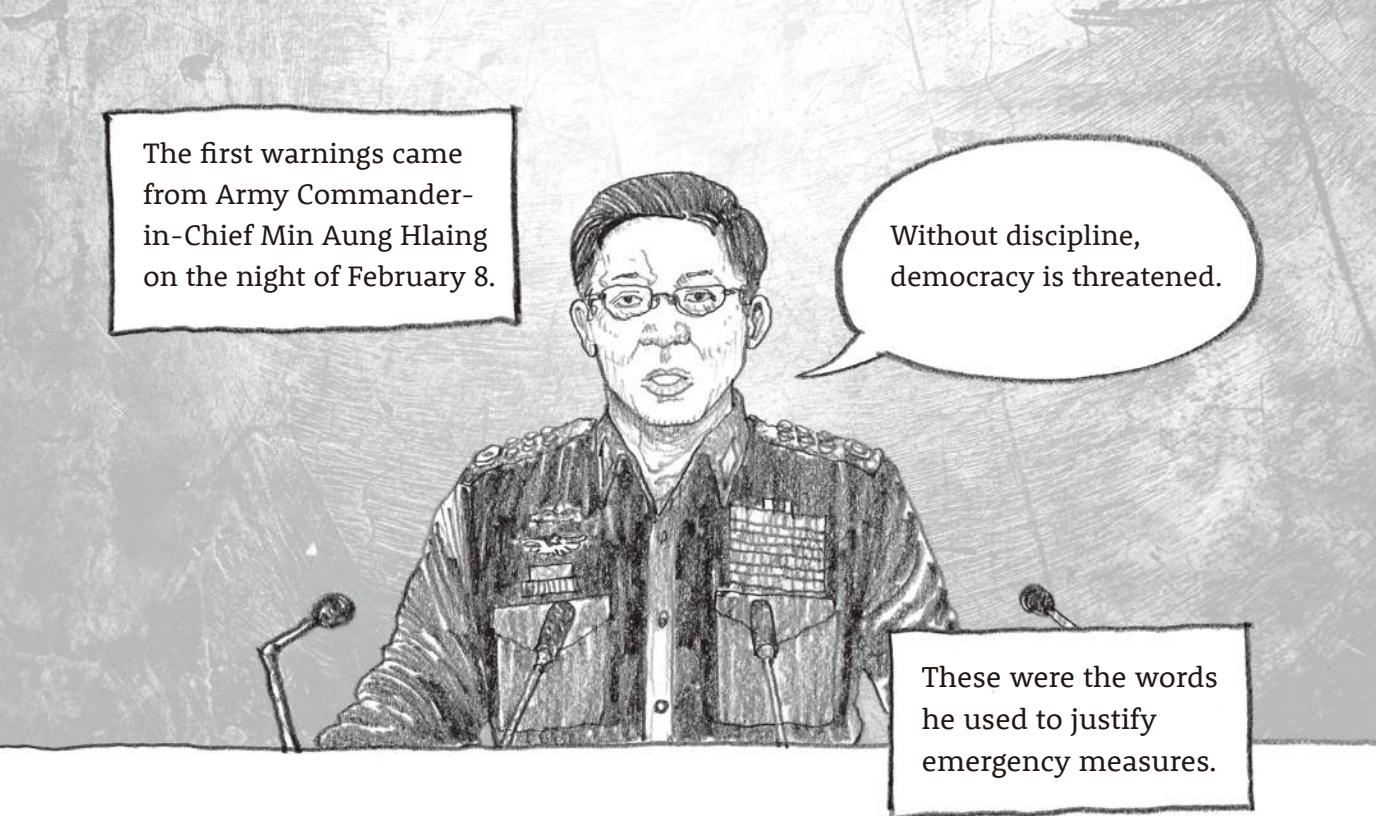
At the same time, in different parts of the country, more and more people are taking to the streets.

I'd rather be dead than having to live through military rule again.

We will overcome this.

Now that there's social media, the military can't do whatever they want. We are constantly connected to the rest of the world now. In 1988, they did whatever they liked. Now, it's a different era.

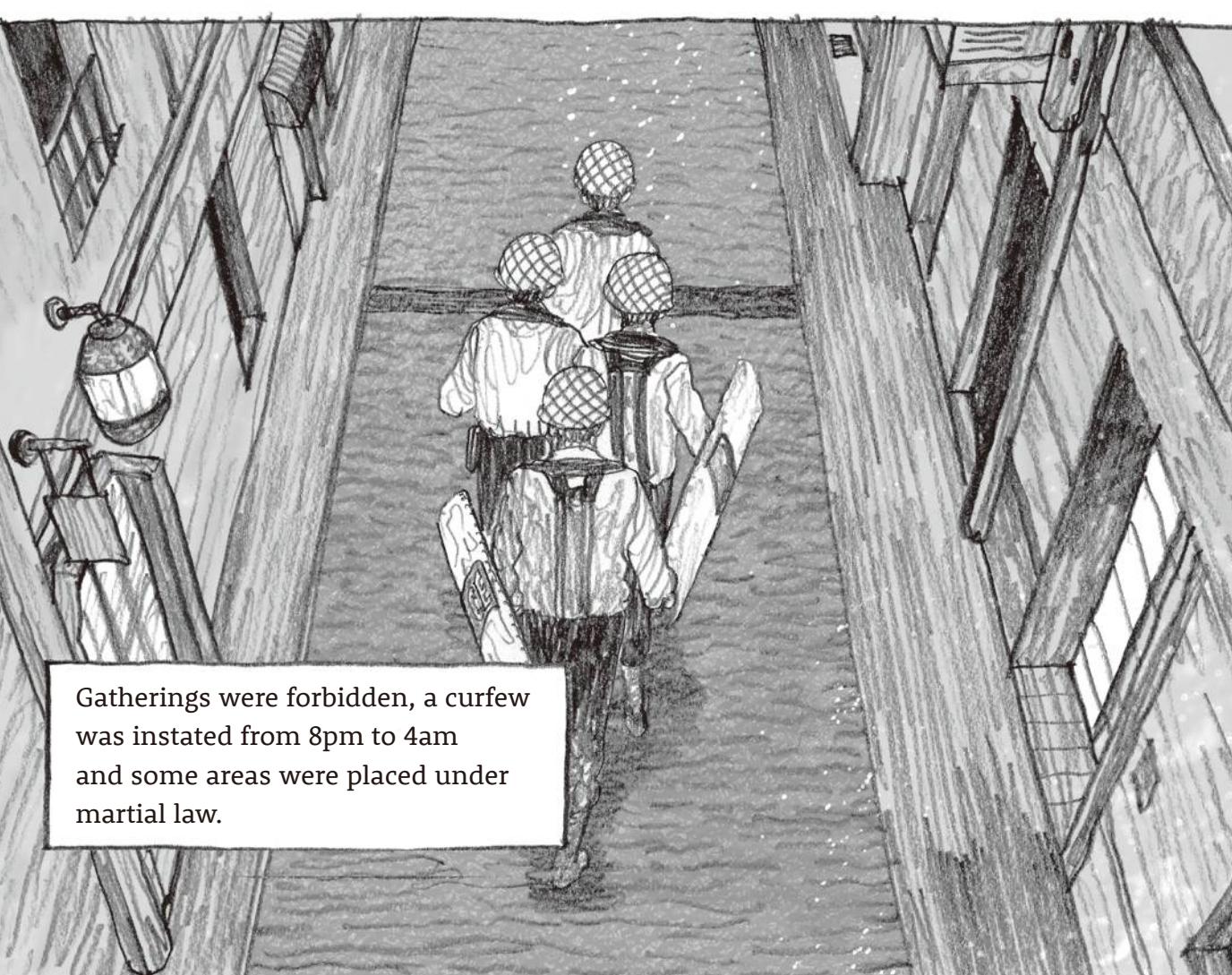
A shop keeper in Yangon who lived through the 1988 uprising and repression.



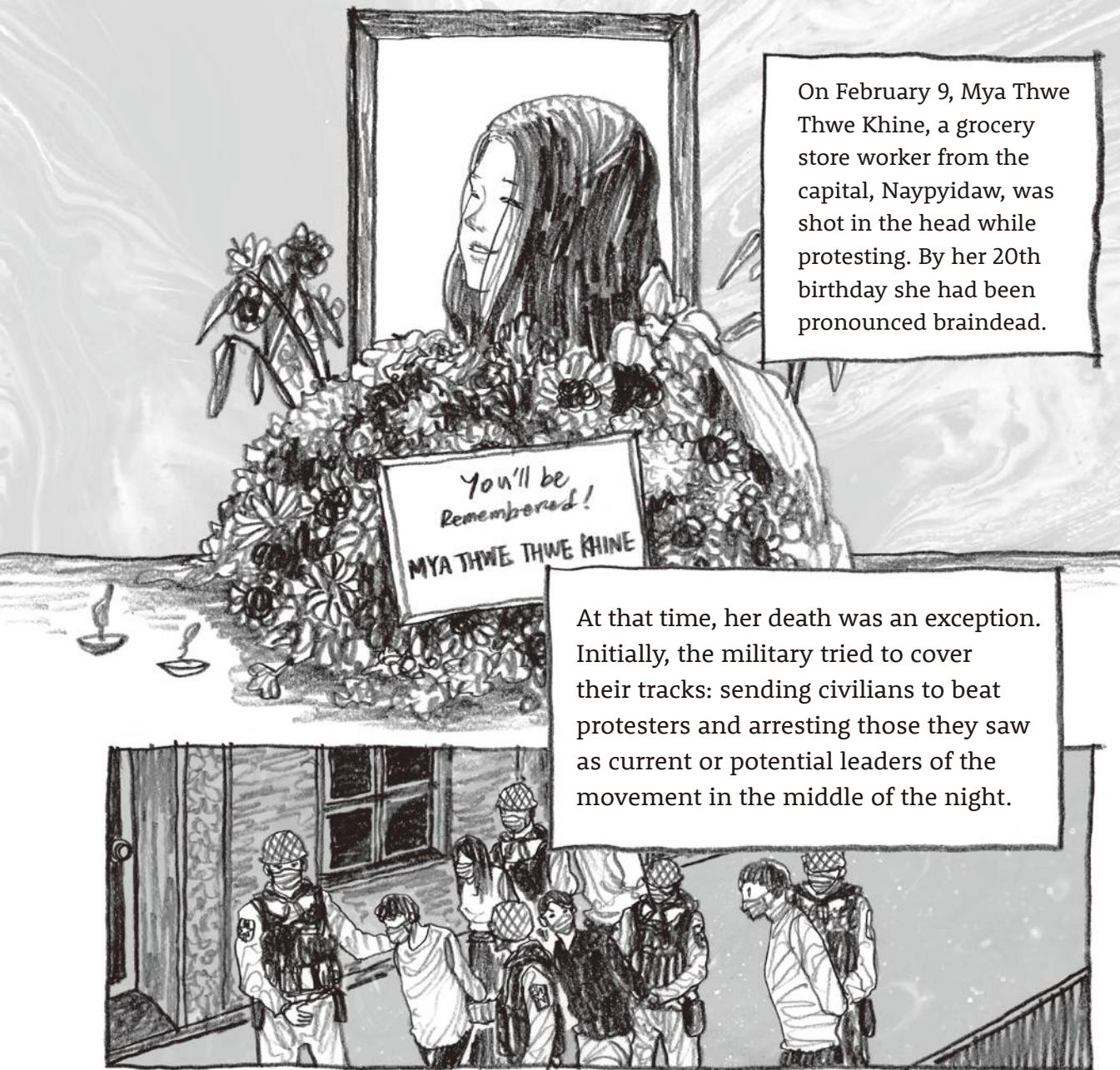
The first warnings came from Army Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing on the night of February 8.

Without discipline, democracy is threatened.

These were the words he used to justify emergency measures.

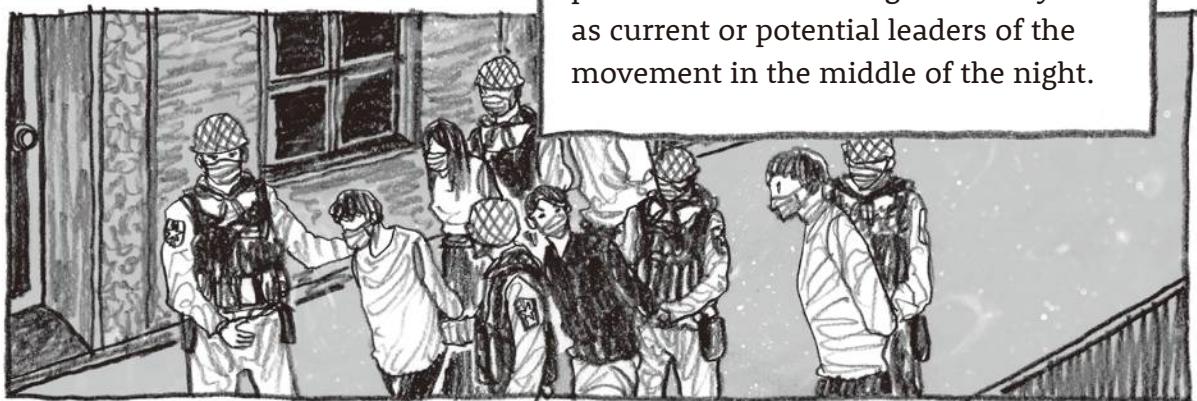


Gatherings were forbidden, a curfew was instated from 8pm to 4am and some areas were placed under martial law.



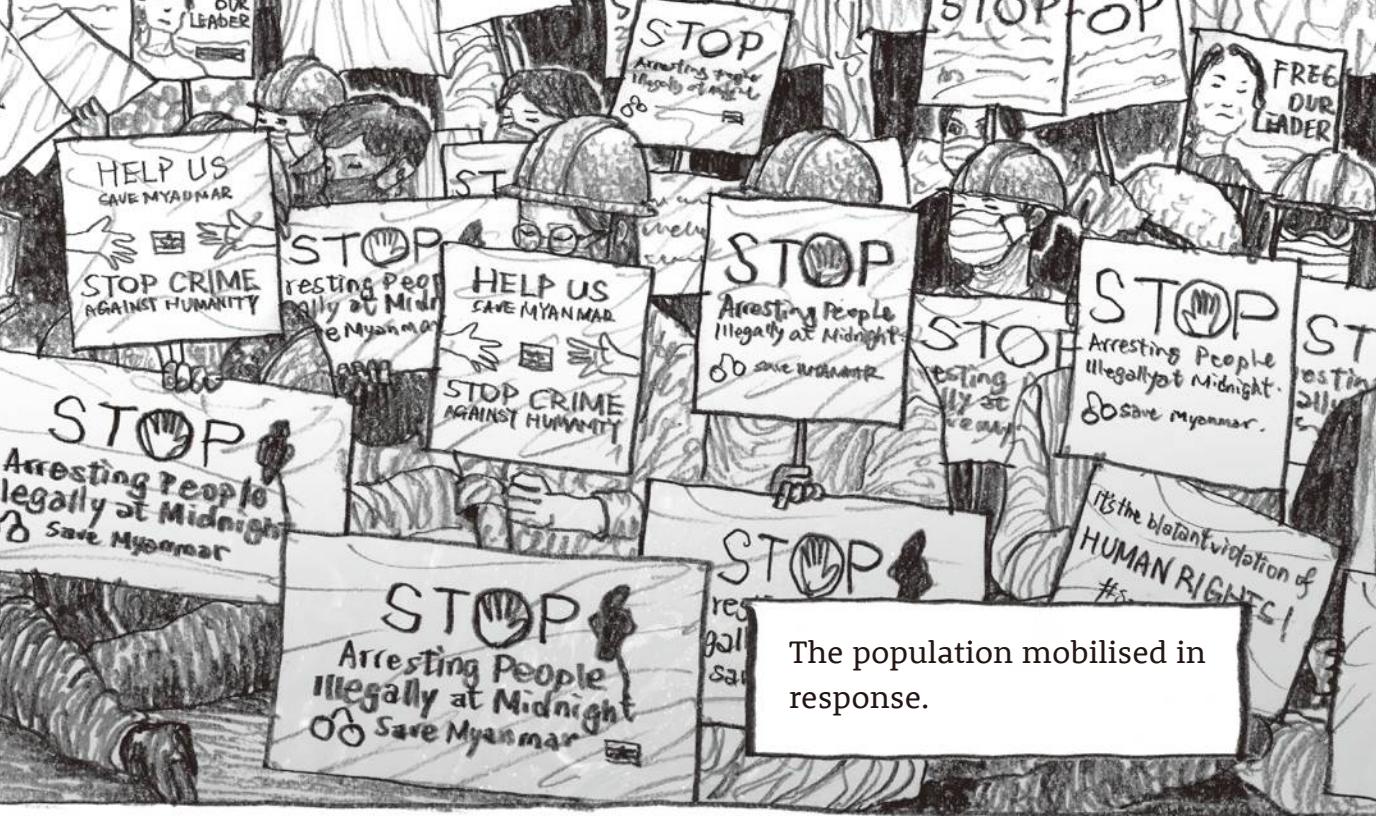
On February 9, Mya Thwe Thwe Khine, a grocery store worker from the capital, Naypyidaw, was shot in the head while protesting. By her 20th birthday she had been pronounced braindead.

At that time, her death was an exception. Initially, the military tried to cover their tracks: sending civilians to beat protesters and arresting those they saw as current or potential leaders of the movement in the middle of the night.



The members of the electoral commission that organised the 2020 elections were particularly targeted. They knew that the vote of November 8 was not fraudulent, contrary to Min Aung Hlaing's claims justifying the military coup. A coup that enabled him to retain his hold over the country's assets and continue to amass great personal wealth.



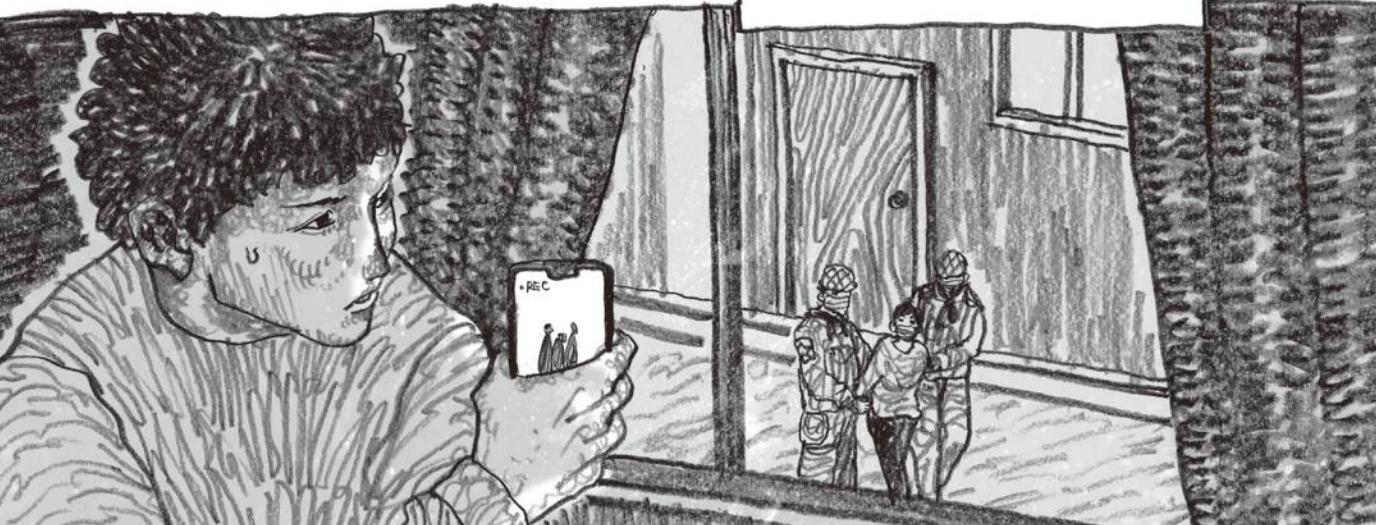


In various places, people formed citizen patrol groups to keep an eye on their neighbourhoods at night,

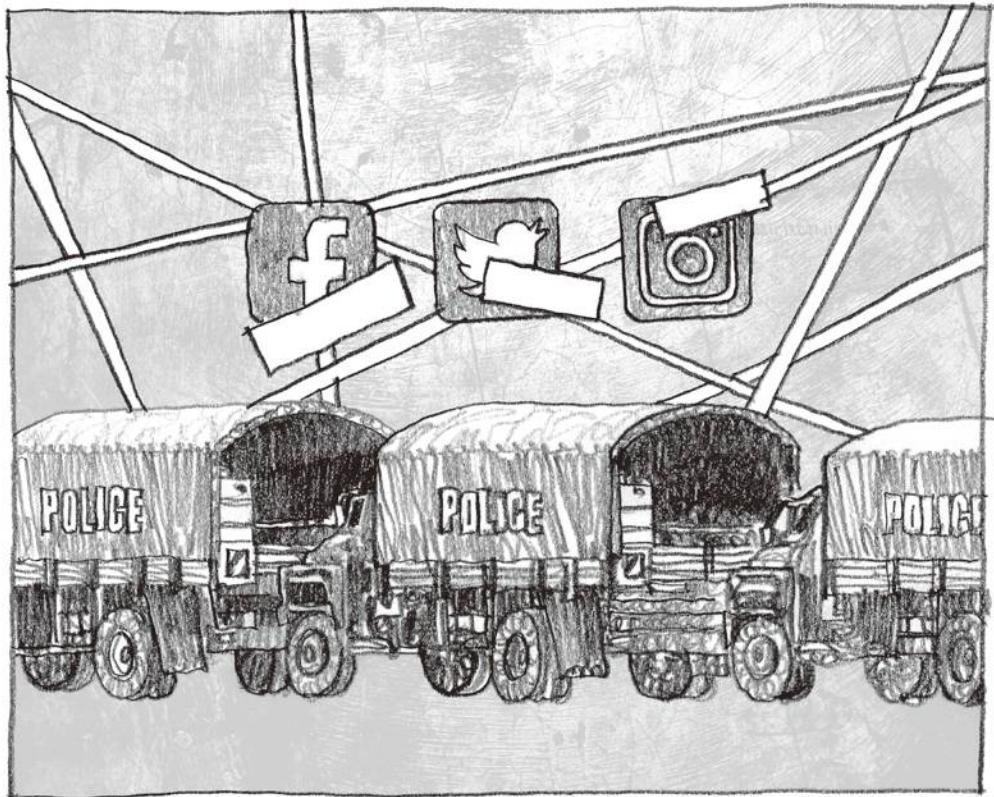
**KIDNAPPING  
AT NIGHT**



and expose nighttime arrests.



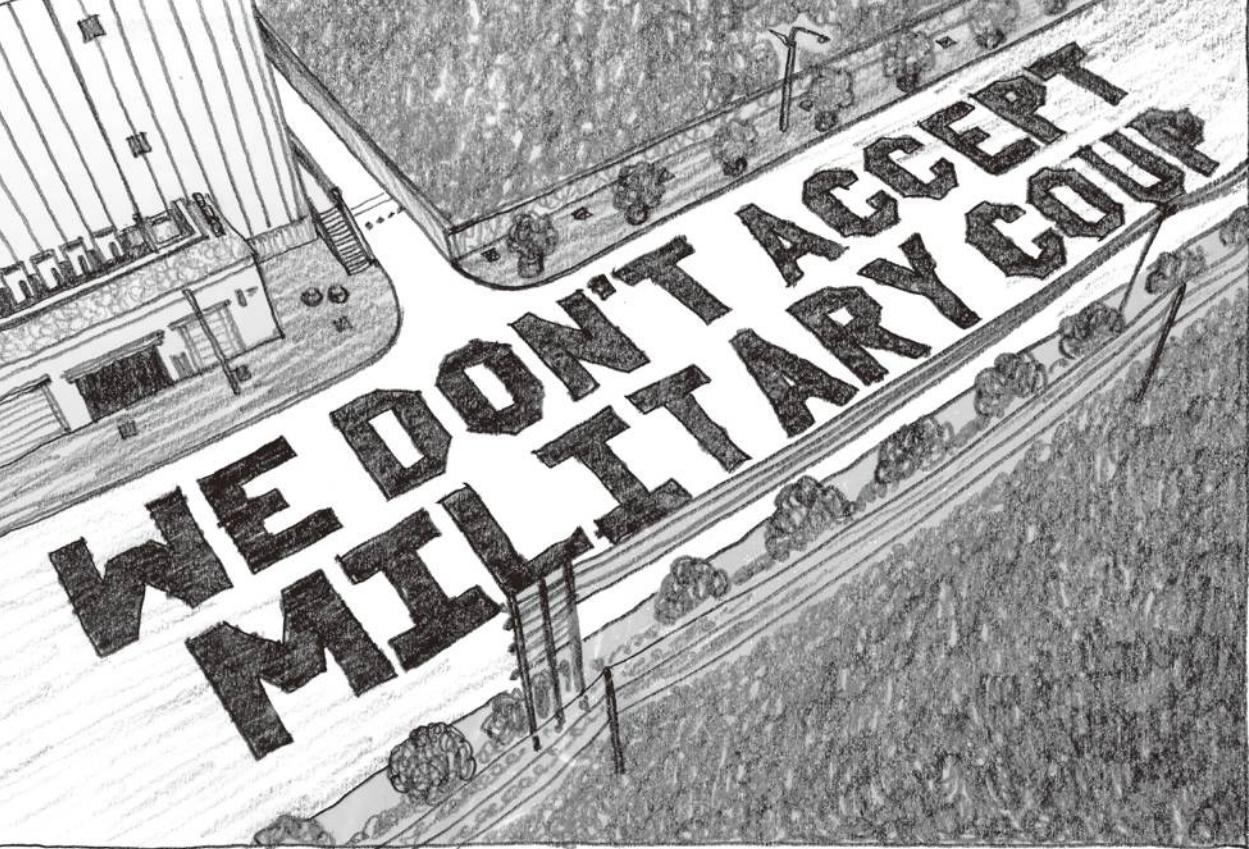
The regime is trying to control internet access and limit protesters' ability to organise and communicate with the outside world.

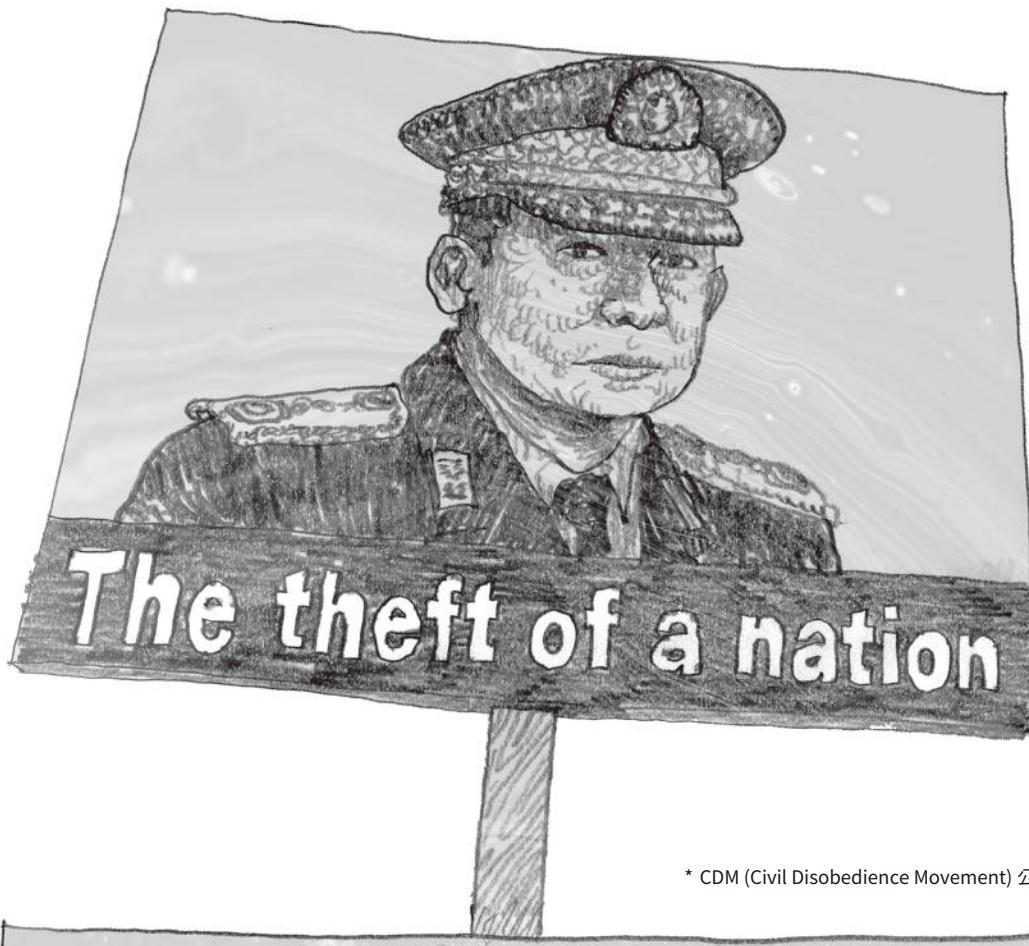


They disguise military vehicles as police vehicles – as if it wasn't obvious that the military is in charge.

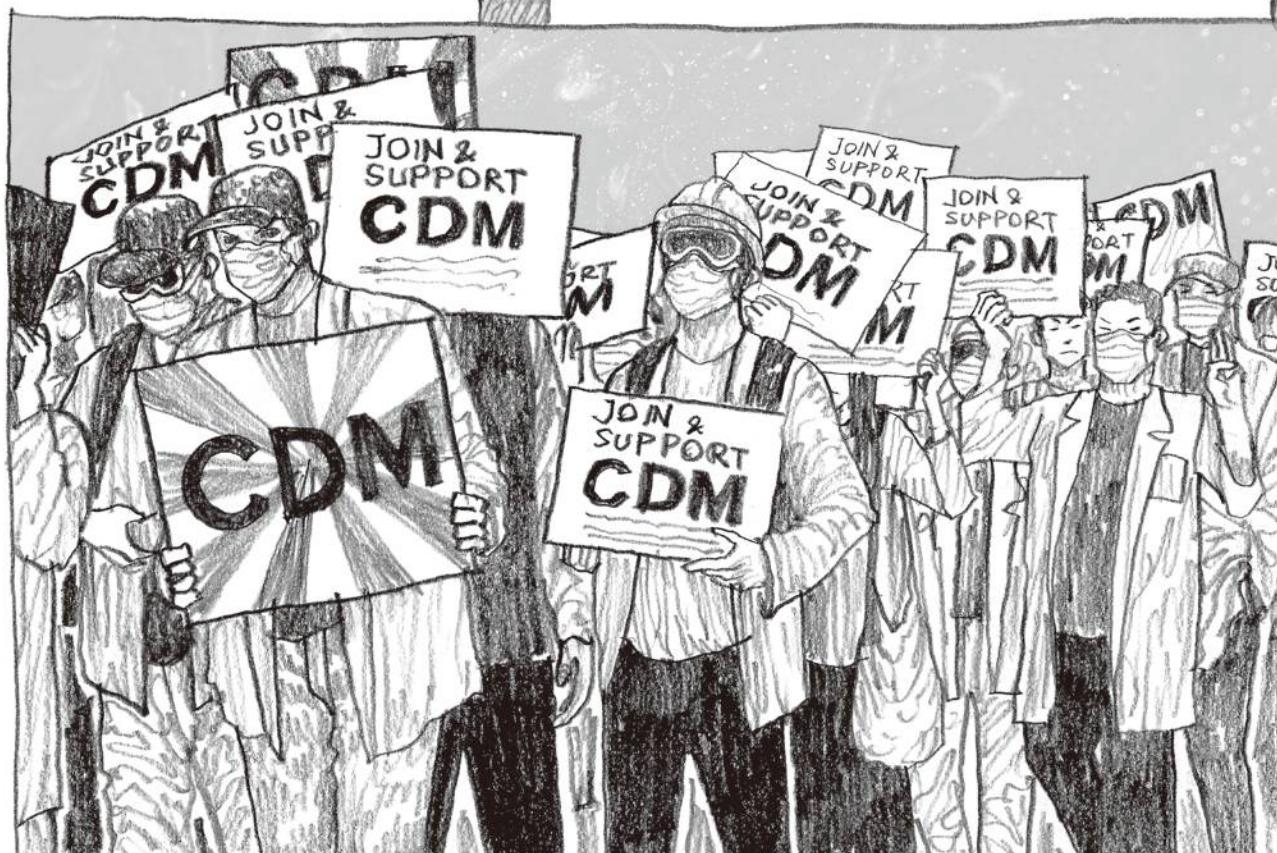


In spite of the risks, protesters are getting their message out to the world.





\* CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement) 公民不服從運動



# SUPPORT CRM



THEY SHOOT IN DAY  
THEY STEAL AT NIGHT

LET THERE BE LIGHT  
LET THERE BE DEMOCRACY

THEY SHI  
THEY STE





**SAVE MYANMAR  
SAVE DEMOCRACY**



MYANMAR  
FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

An activist from 1988 describes a certain tendency in Burmese political culture.

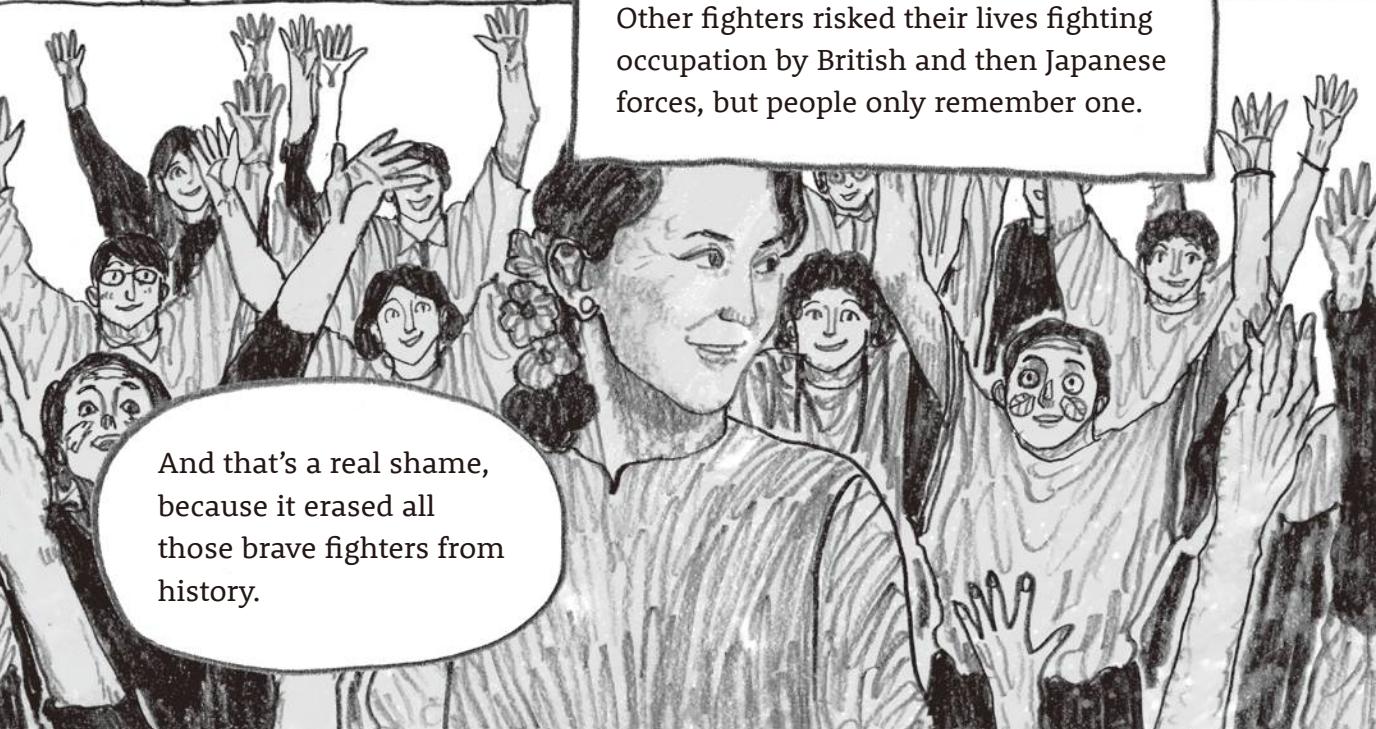
People are always looking for a hero, someone to look up to.



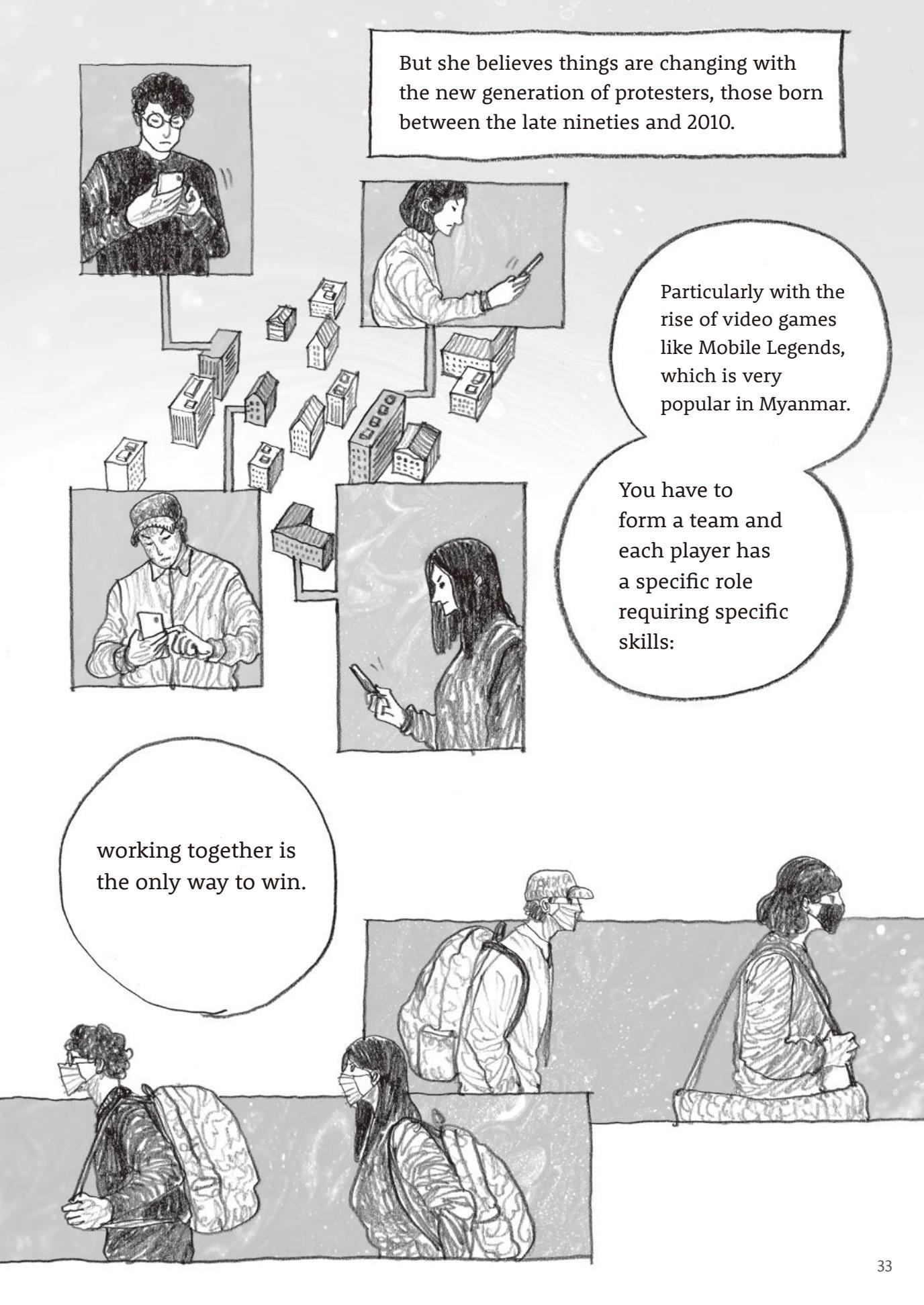
For many Burmese, Aung San Suu Kyi is like an aunt, or even a mother. Criticising her is unthinkable.



Before her, there was her father, Aung San: a hero of the battle for independence. Other fighters risked their lives fighting occupation by British and then Japanese forces, but people only remember one.



And that's a real shame, because it erased all those brave fighters from history.

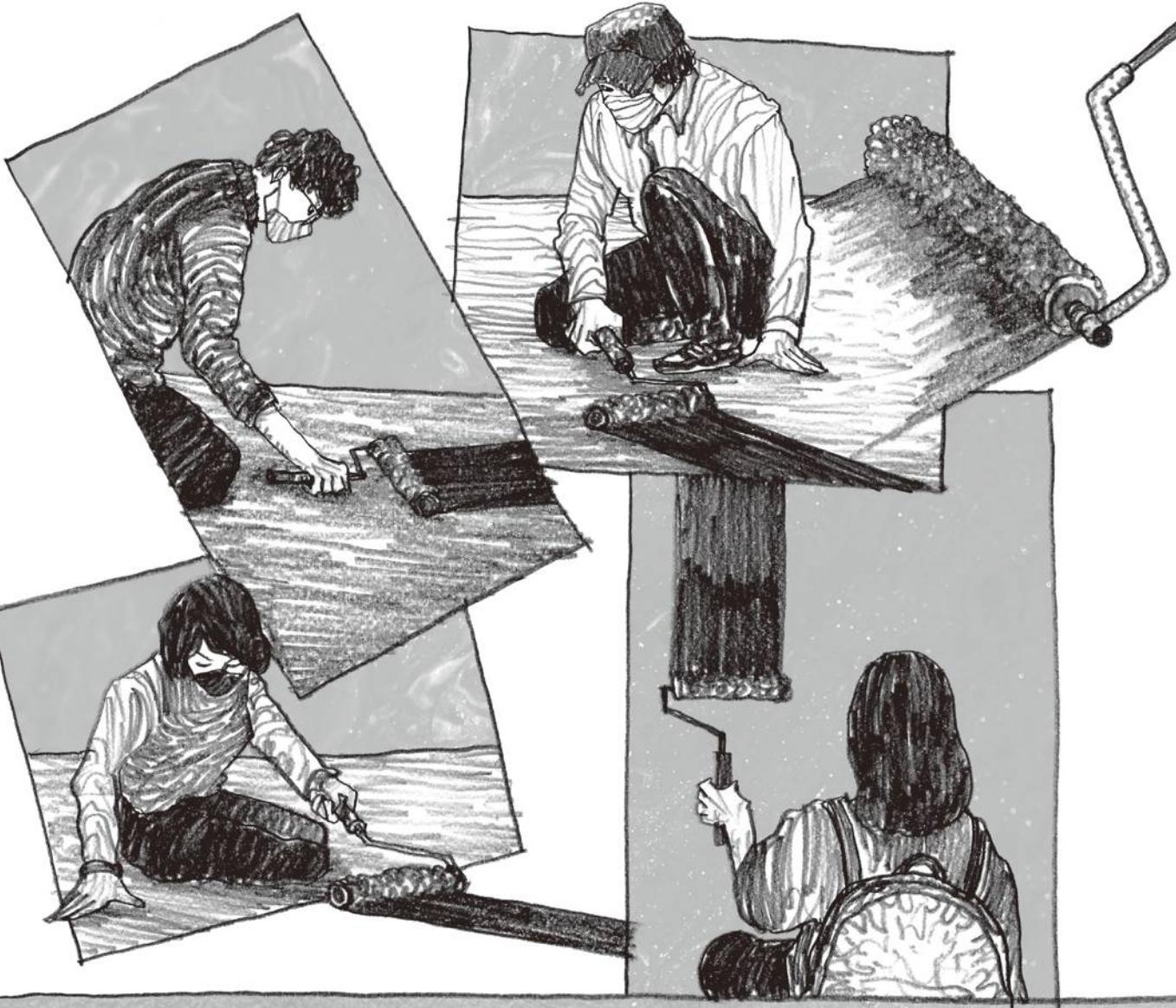


But she believes things are changing with the new generation of protesters, those born between the late nineties and 2010.

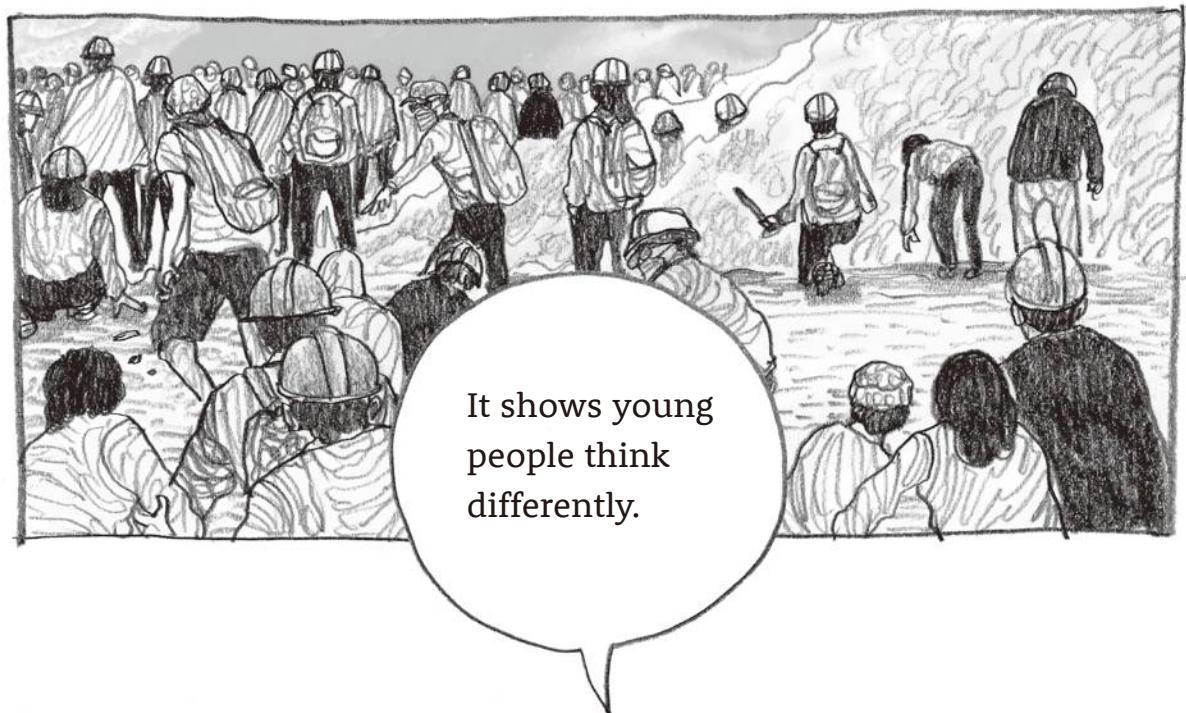
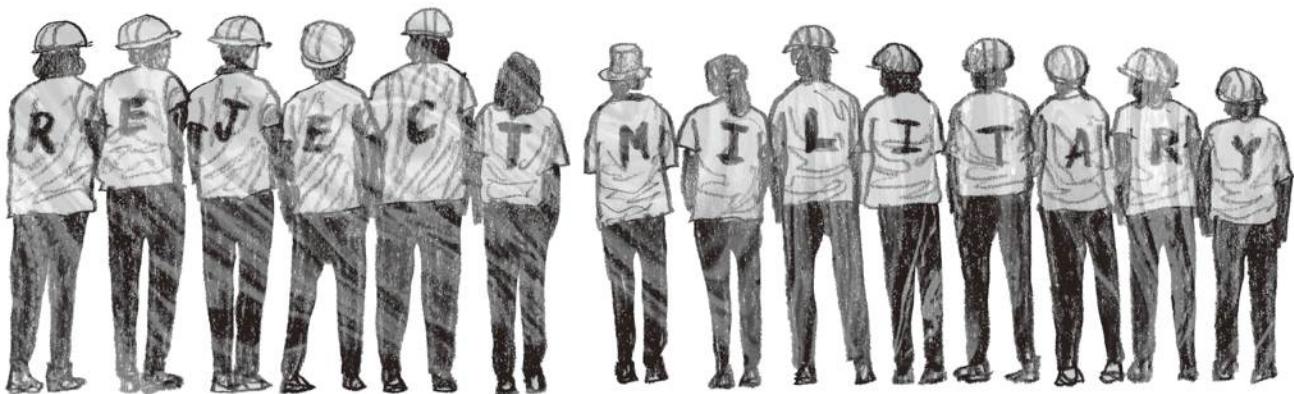
Particularly with the rise of video games like Mobile Legends, which is very popular in Myanmar.

You have to form a team and each player has a specific role requiring specific skills:

working together is the only way to win.

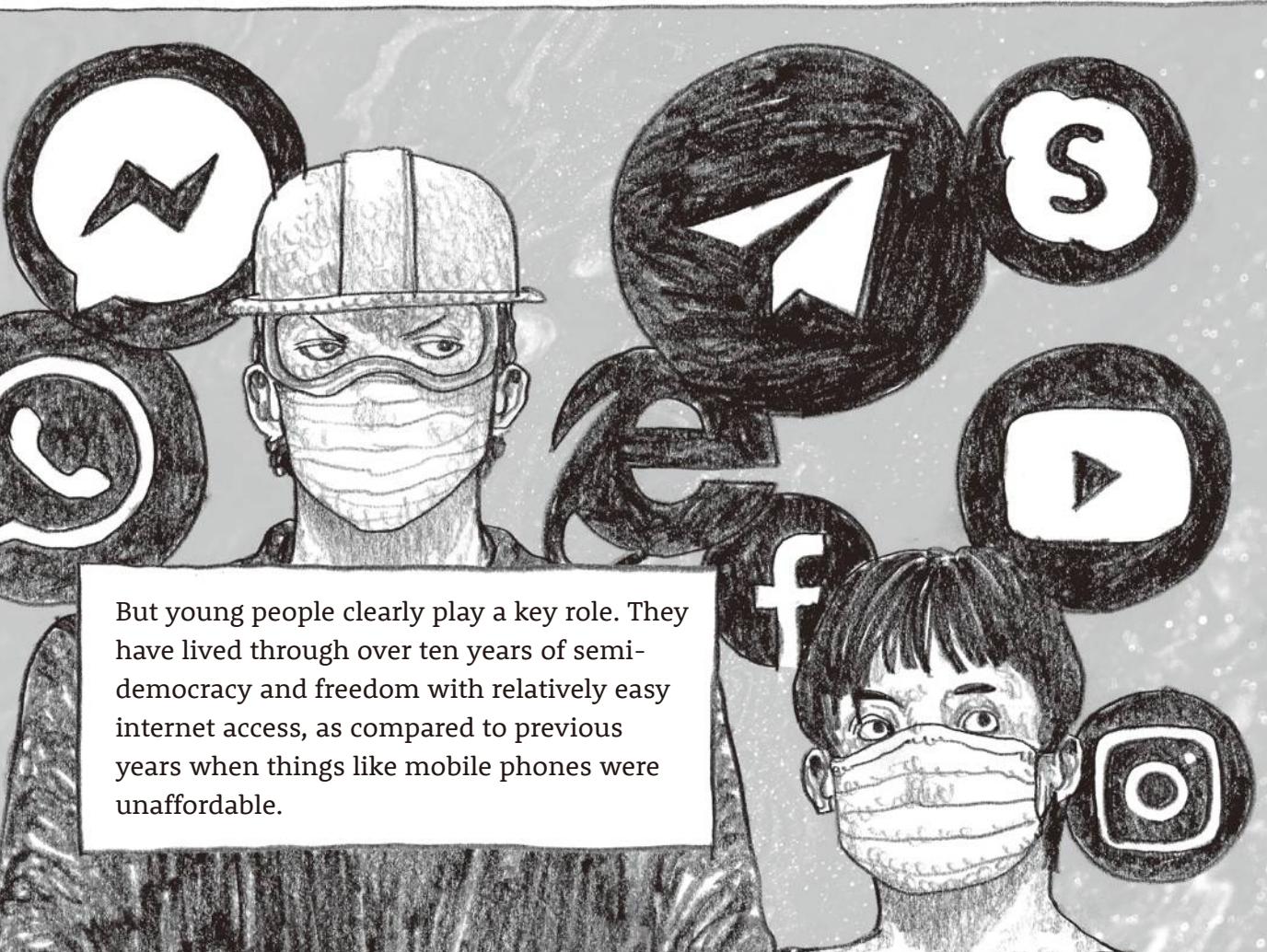


WE WANT DEMOCRACY  
SAVE MYANMAR





The resistance against the military coup is not just a youth movement: it has united all generations.



But young people clearly play a key role. They have lived through over ten years of semi-democracy and freedom with relatively easy internet access, as compared to previous years when things like mobile phones were unaffordable.

Many of them are looking to pro-democracy movements in Ukraine, Thailand and Hong Kong for inspiration.

Some young Burmese people even see themselves as part of the Milk Tea Alliance: an anti-authoritarian movement formed by young people from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Thailand, in opposition to the Chinese government and the Thai military regime.





Operating chiefly online, the Milk Tea Alliance is an informal activist network which is spreading across Asia. On social media, its members use humour as a weapon to destabilise their anti-democratic rivals.



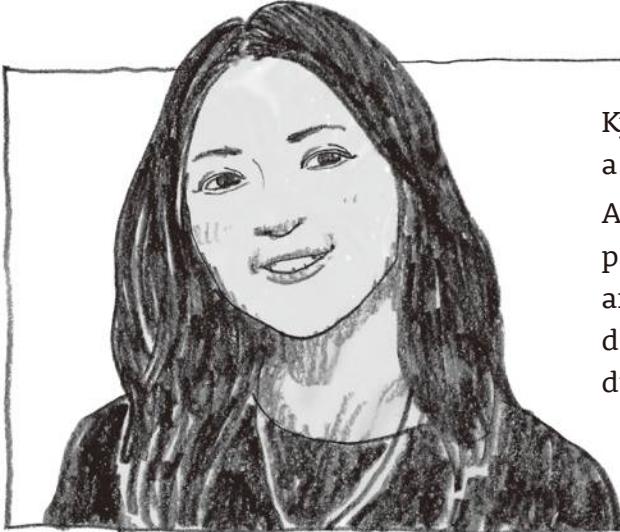
But they also share their experiences and advice. Myanmar is now a full part of this alliance.

#Angel





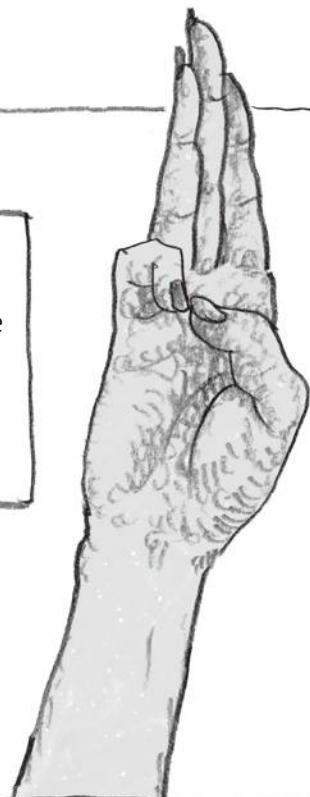
By the end of February, the much feared crackdown had already begun. Now, the daily death toll was sometimes in the dozens.



Kyal Sin, nicknamed “Angel”, became a symbol of the resistance.

A few days before her death, she posted her blood-type on Facebook and asked for her organs to be donated if something happened to her during the protests.

Kyal Sin was a dancer and taekwondo champion. She was nineteen years old when she was shot dead by the army. Like others, she protested the military coup with the three-finger salute from the Hunger Games films, used by pro-democracy protesters in Thailand.



On March 3, she was wearing a t-shirt that said: “Everything will be OK”.



It could have been anyone,  
it could have been me, it  
could have been my friend.

They can arrest us in our  
homes at night and we're  
terrified.



We just want our freedom back. If we lose, we'll have to live under a new military government, we'll have to live in fear with no future.

A black and white illustration showing two soldiers in a trench. One soldier is in the foreground, holding a rifle, while the other is further back. In the background, there is a large explosion or fire. The scene is depicted with heavy shading and texture.





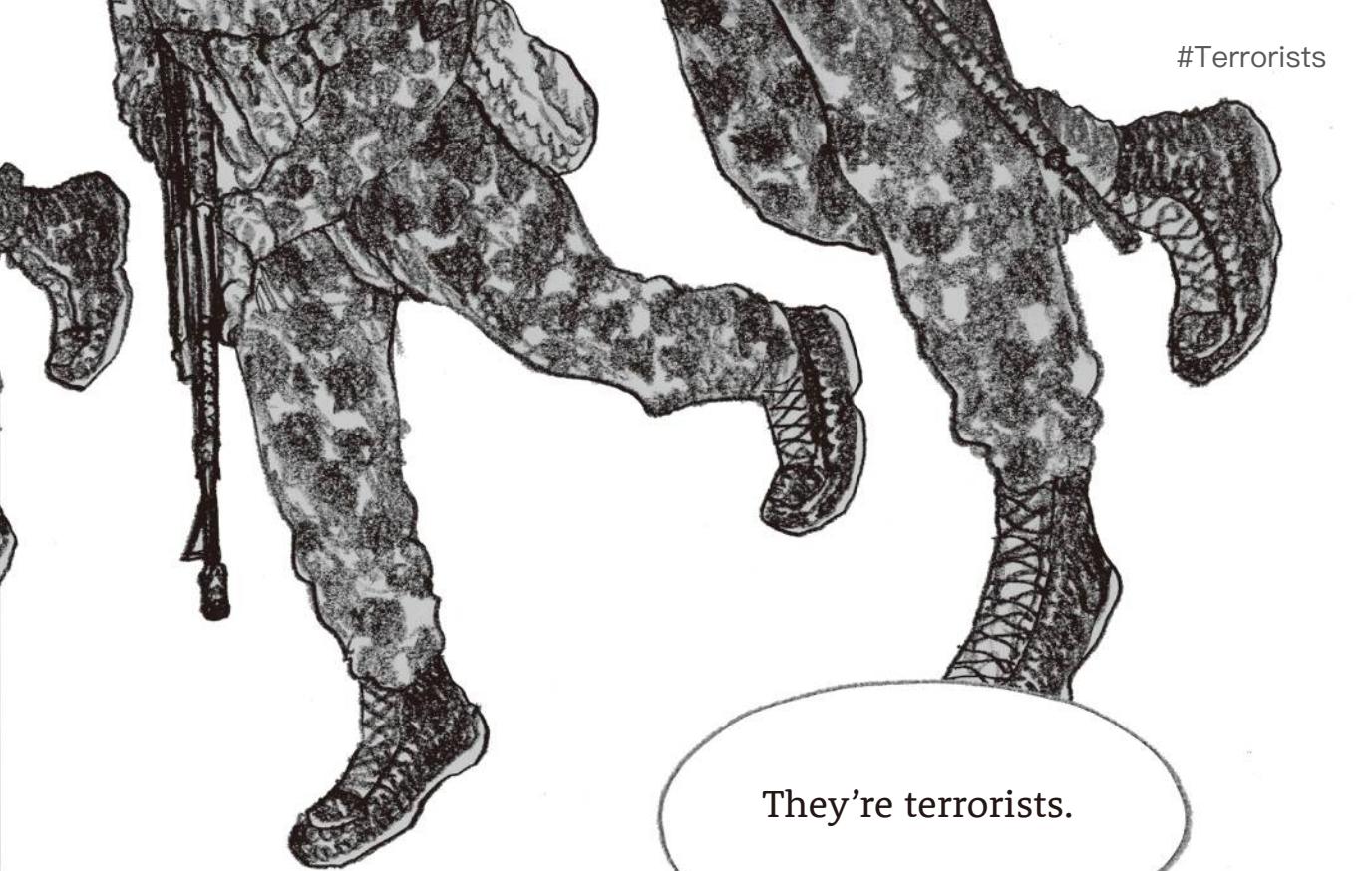
A 23-year-old student protester.

Sure I'm scared,

but I think it's  
our duty.

It's time to give our all.





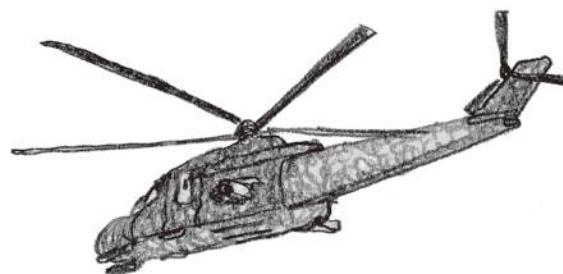
They're terrorists.



They're  
terrorising the  
population.

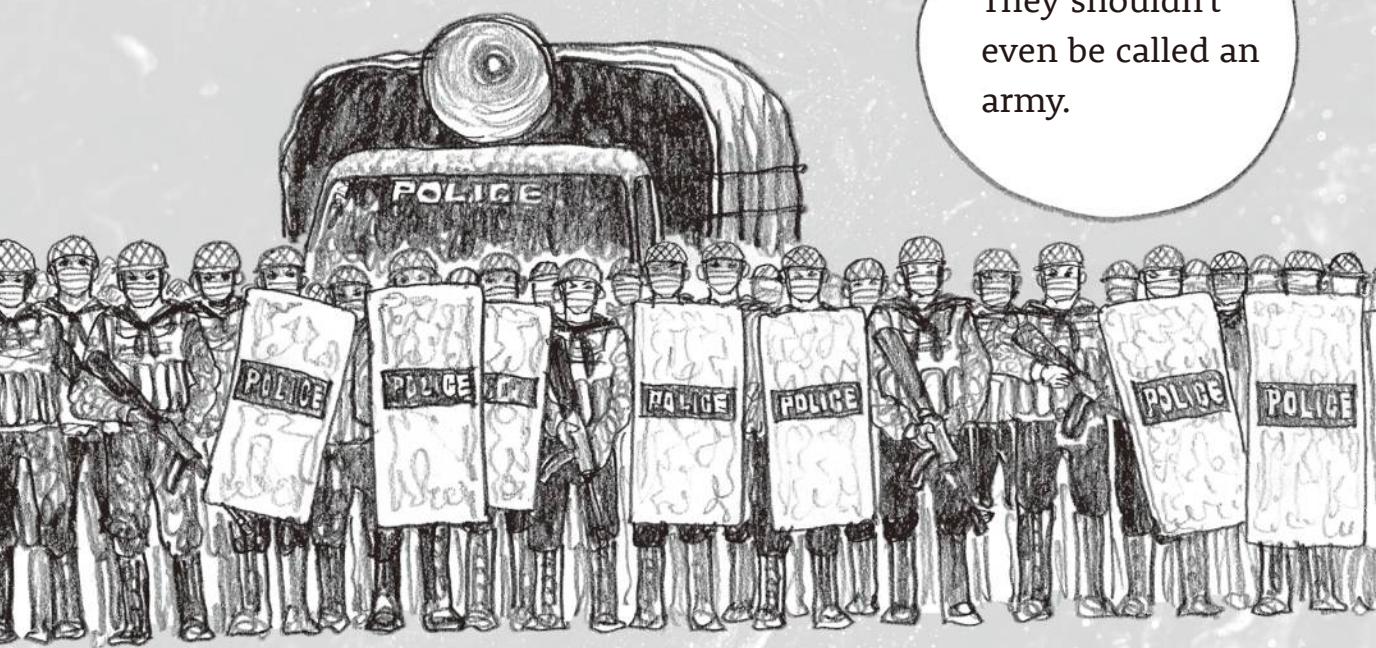
Well-known activist Thet Swe Win, believes the UN should send in peacekeepers.

Nothing good will come from the army.



They are murderers.

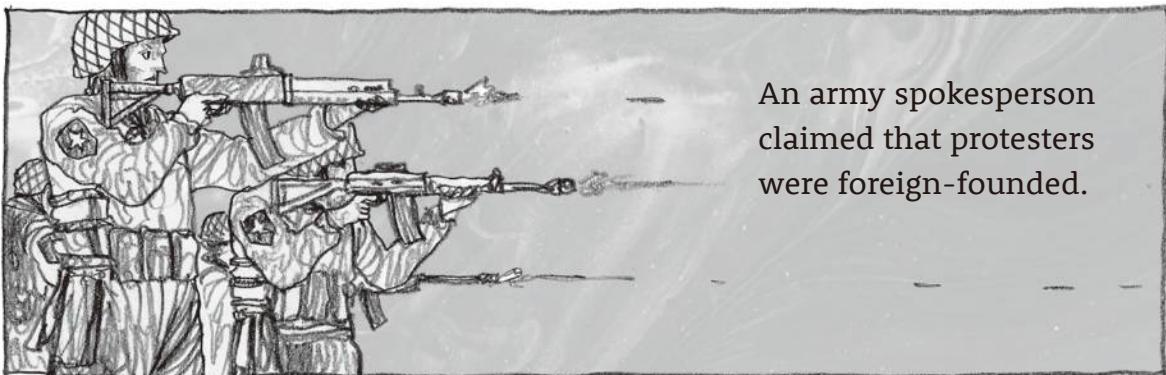
They shouldn't even be called an army.



His concerns are echoed by a Burmese army captain, speaking anonymously about the ideological brainwashing of soldiers:

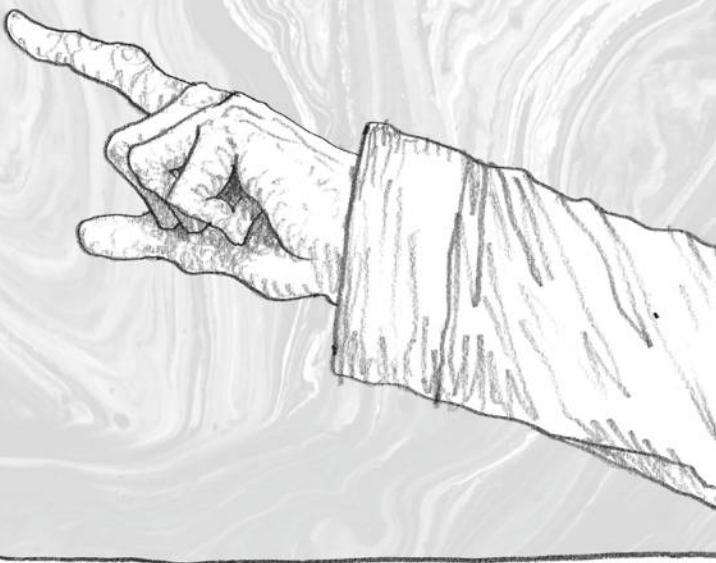


they are killing people with the mindset that they are protecting their nation from foreign intervention.

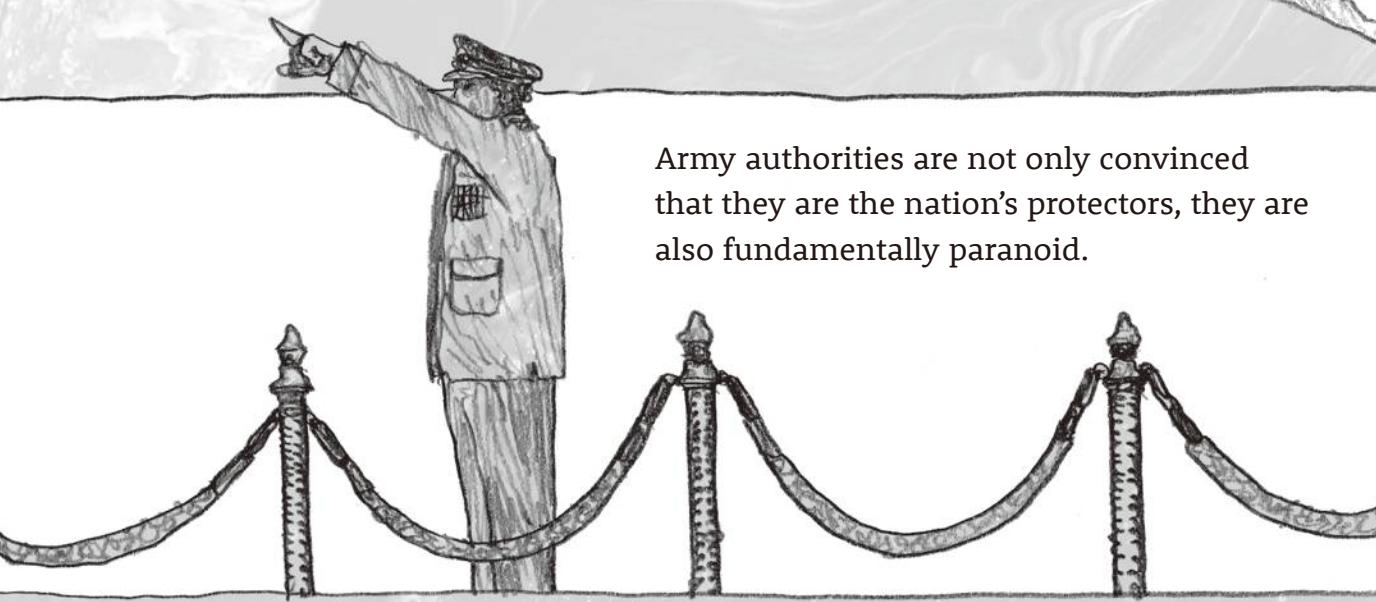


To retain their hold on the country's wealth, military command must stop soldiers from realising what is really going on.

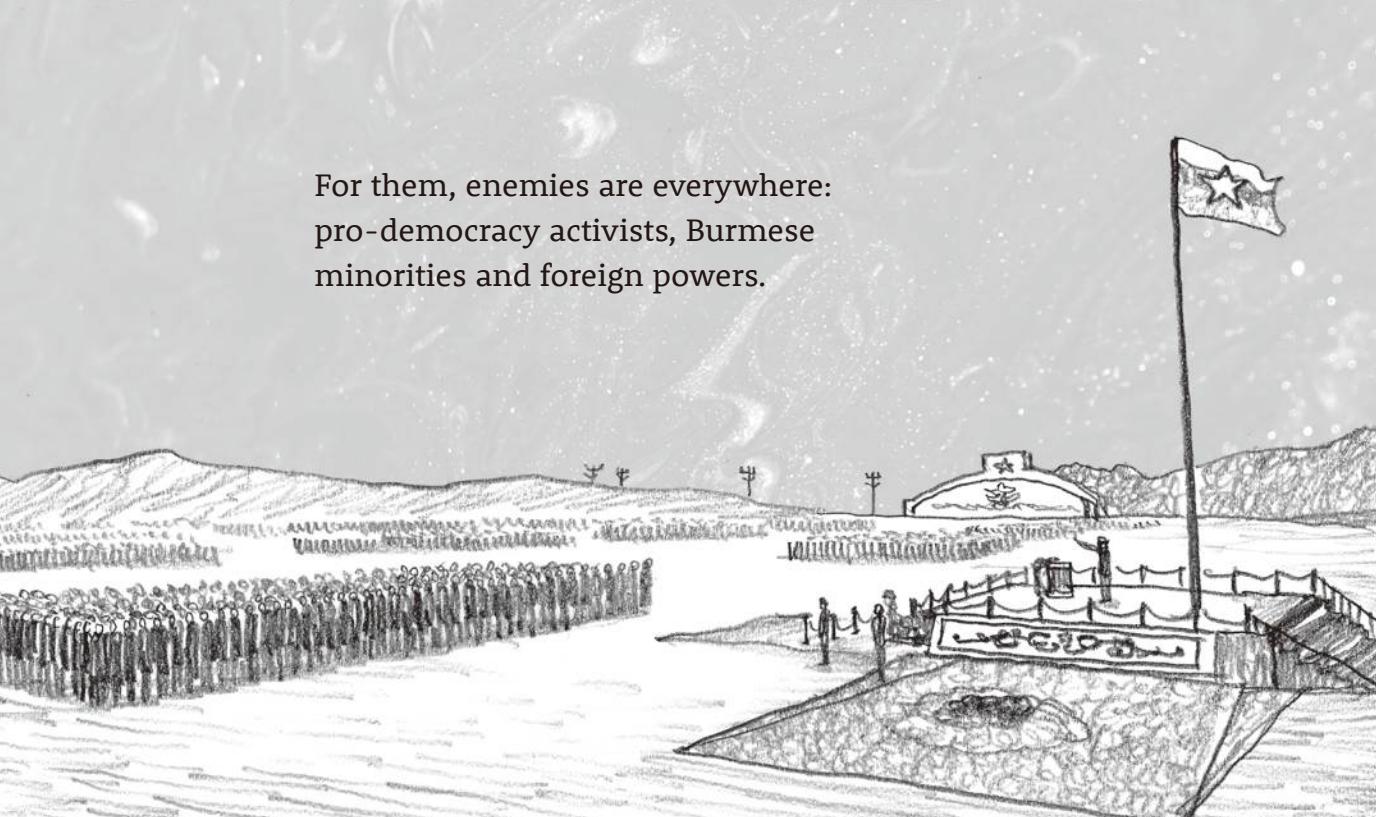




But this idea of a foreign plot may not simply be propaganda aimed at ensuring the loyalty of their troops.



Army authorities are not only convinced that they are the nation's protectors, they are also fundamentally paranoid.



For them, enemies are everywhere: pro-democracy activists, Burmese minorities and foreign powers.



We need action.

Thet Swe Win insists.

Words are no longer enough.

We keep being told that people are concerned about us, and that they condemn the army for this or that.

But these terrorists, these murderers – they don't care. They will keep killing people.



The problem is  
always the same:  
China and Russia.

They hold the power of  
veto at the United Nations  
Security Council and can  
block any effective action  
against the Burmese army.

But it's clear Beijing  
is not happy:

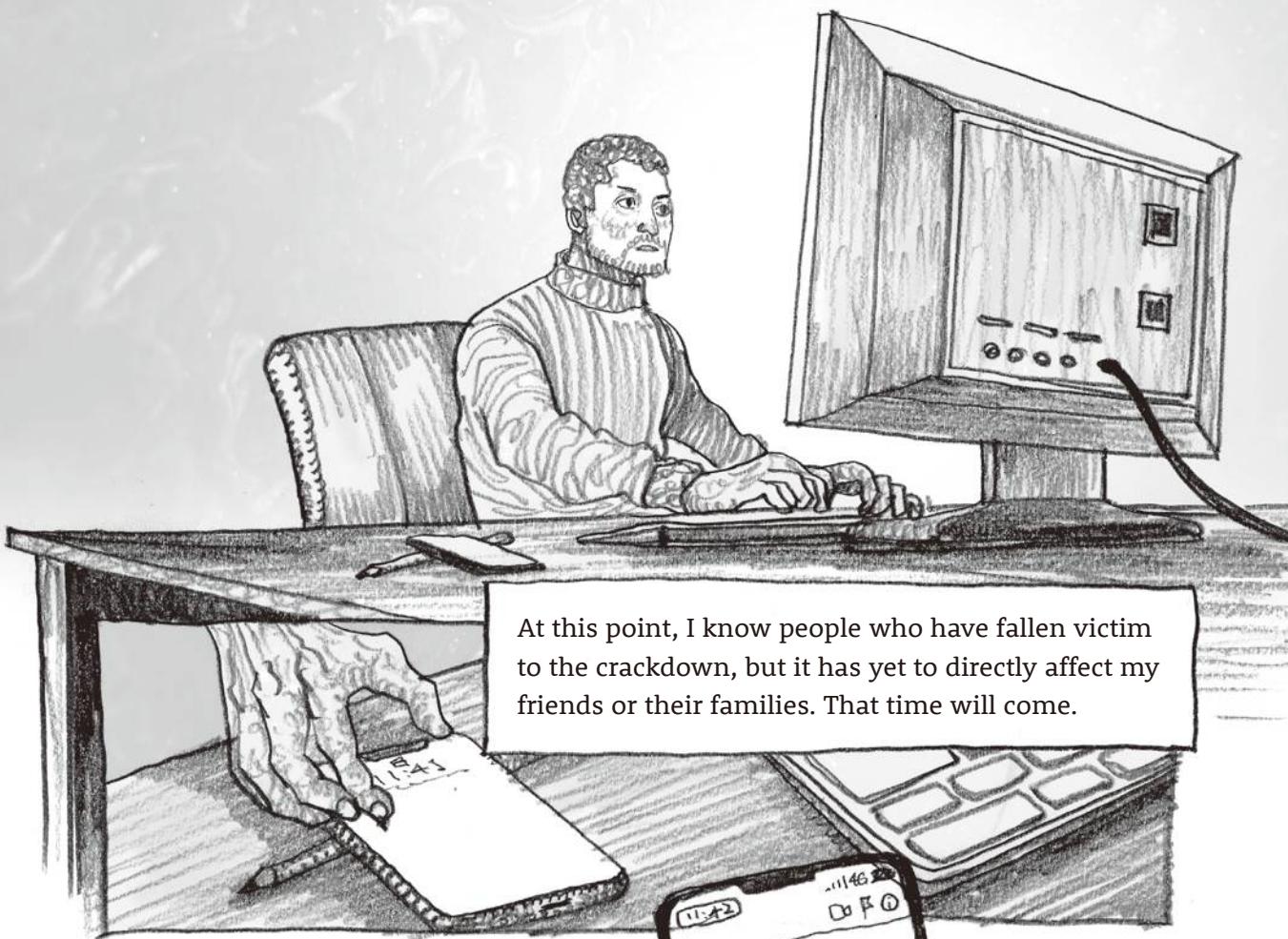
the military coup has  
created instability,  
and that's not good for  
business, especially for  
its new Belt and Road  
project,



for which Myanmar provides access to the Indian Ocean.

So China's support for the Burmese generals has flagged somewhat, but it is not yet ready to abandon them.





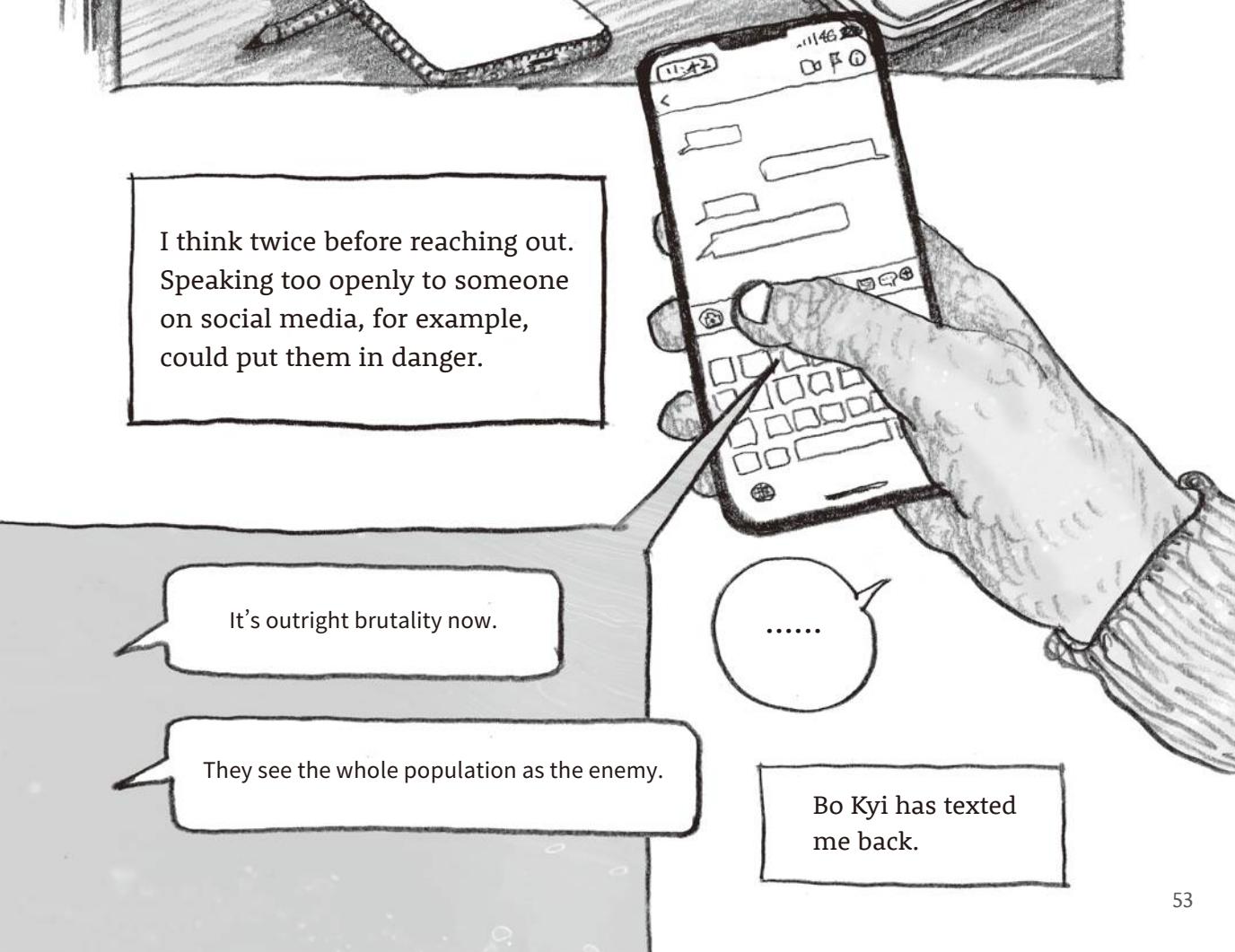
At this point, I know people who have fallen victim to the crackdown, but it has yet to directly affect my friends or their families. That time will come.

I think twice before reaching out. Speaking too openly to someone on social media, for example, could put them in danger.

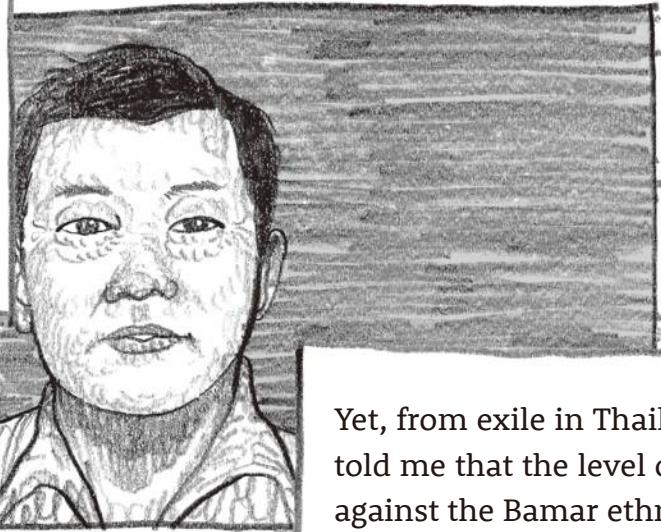
It's outright brutality now.

They see the whole population as the enemy.

Bo Kyi has texted me back.



He runs the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Myanmar\*. He lived through the repression of the 1988 pro-democracy movement, and paid for his convictions with years of imprisonment and torture.



Yet, from exile in Thailand, he told me that the level of violence against the Bamar ethnic majority is unprecedented.

\* 政治犯援助協會 (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners / AAPP) , 2000 年由緬甸流亡政治犯在泰國成立。

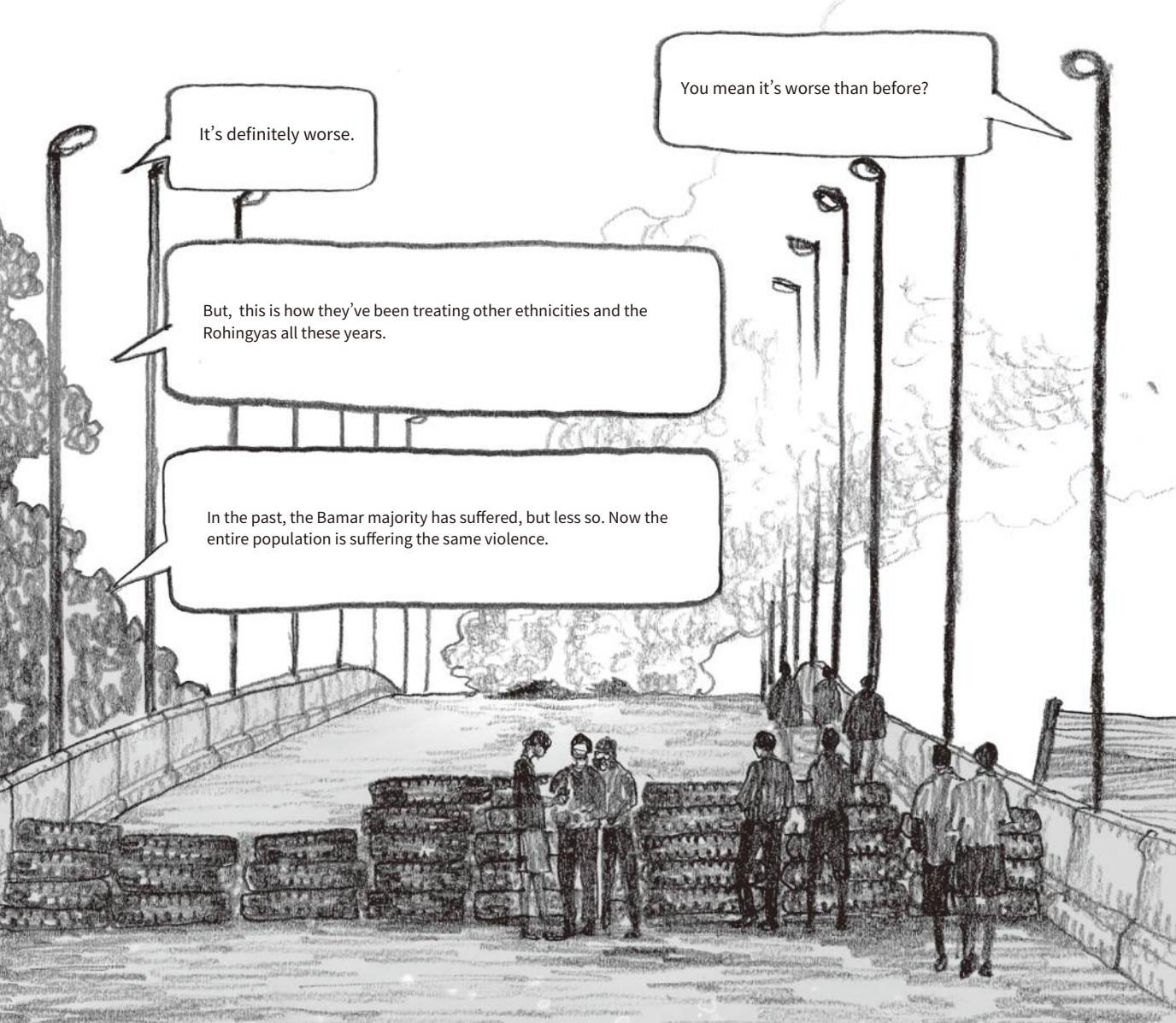
\* The AAPP was founded in Thailand in 2000 by former Burmese political prisoners.

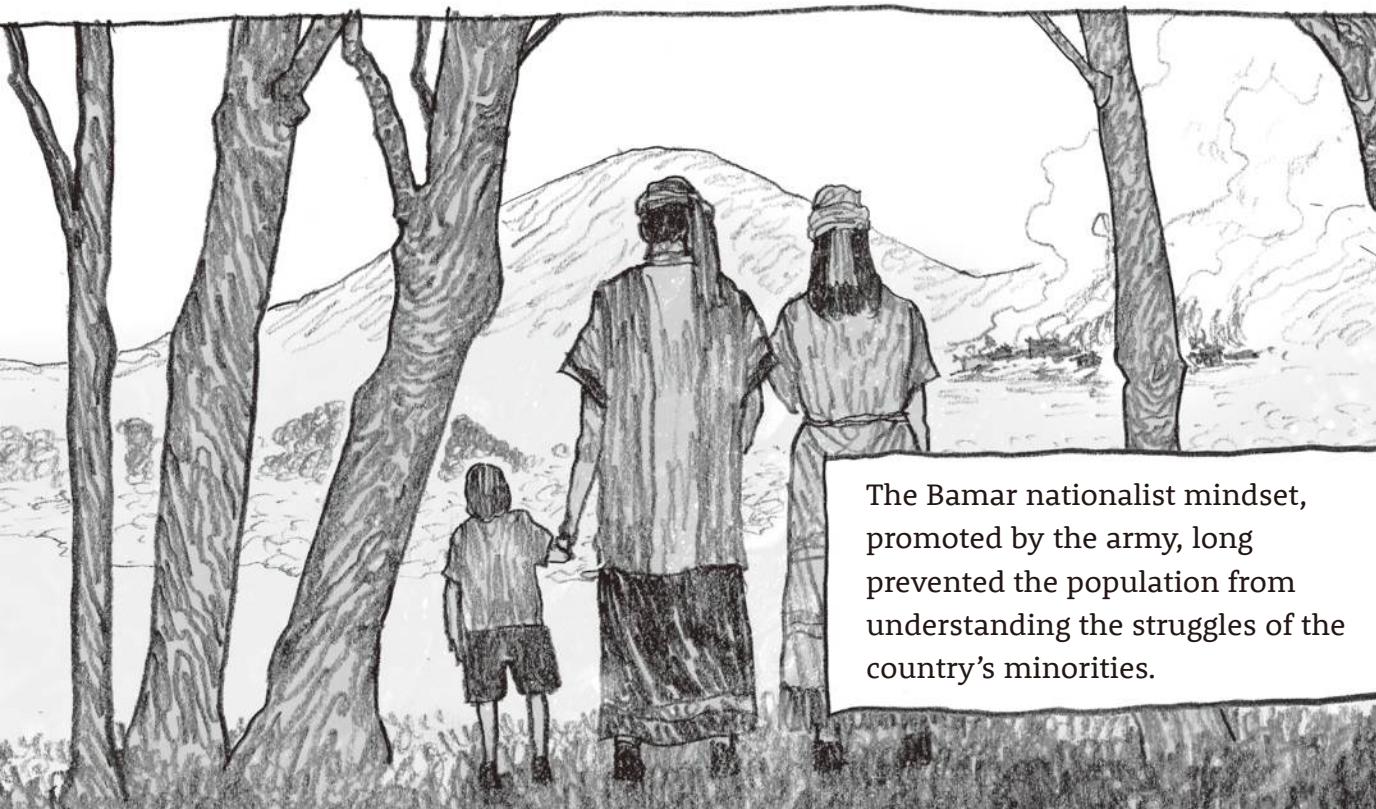
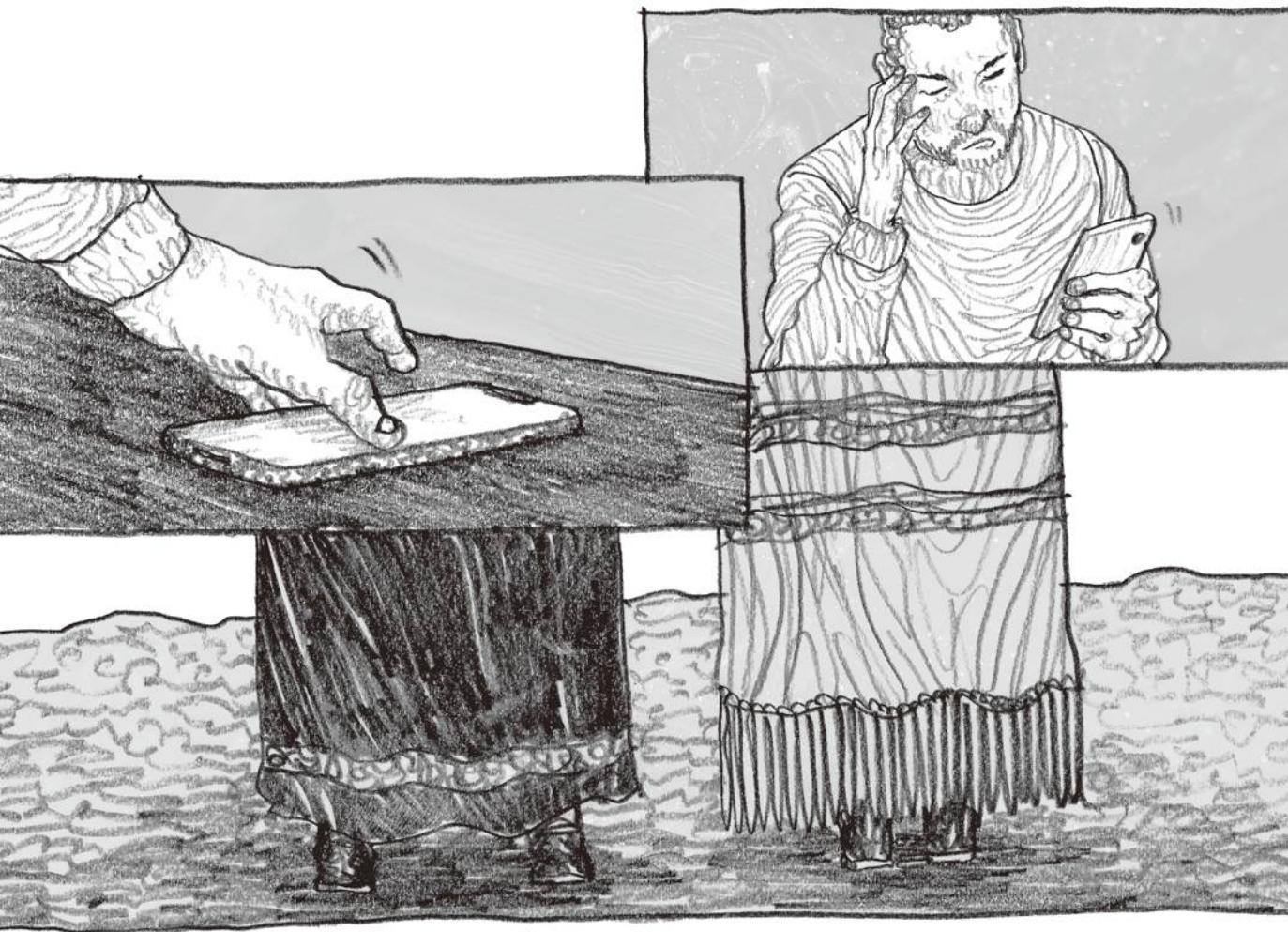
It's definitely worse.

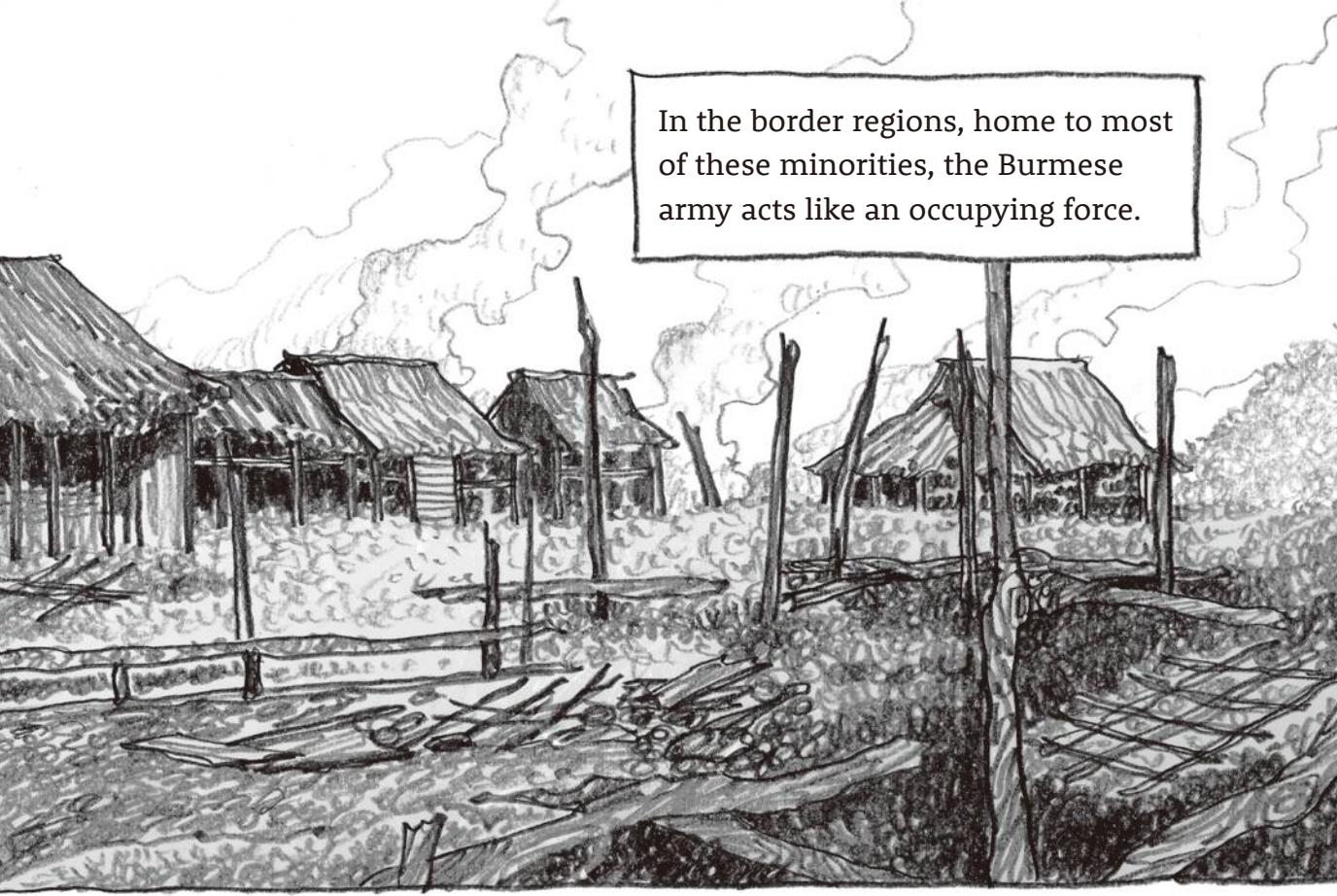
You mean it's worse than before?

But, this is how they've been treating other ethnicities and the Rohingyas all these years.

In the past, the Bamar majority has suffered, but less so. Now the entire population is suffering the same violence.

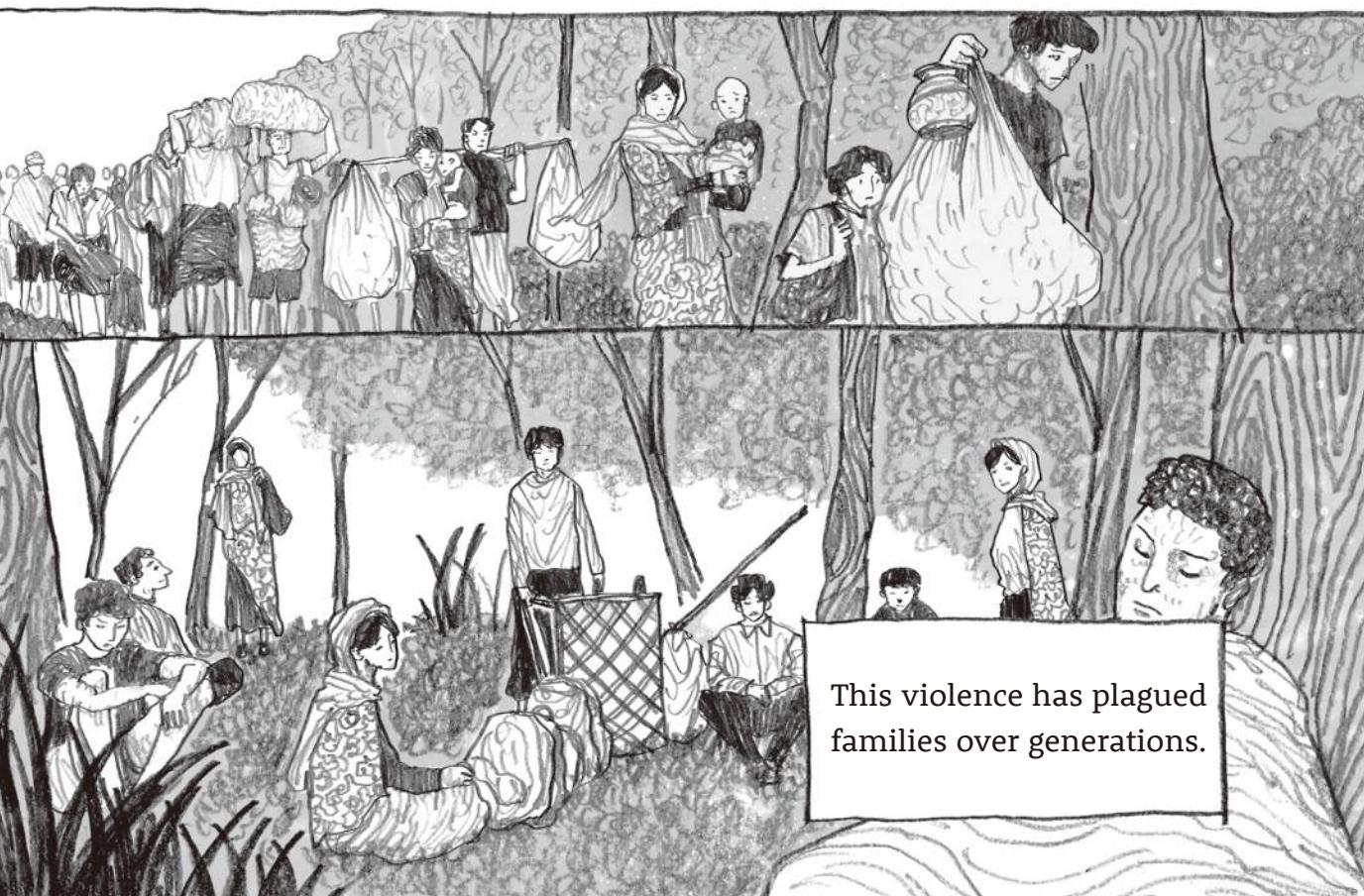






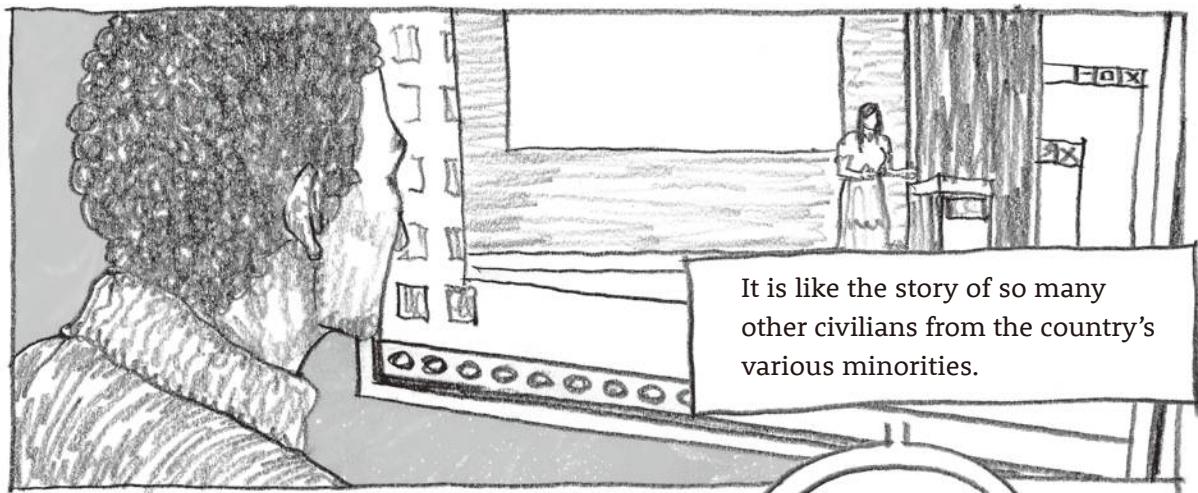
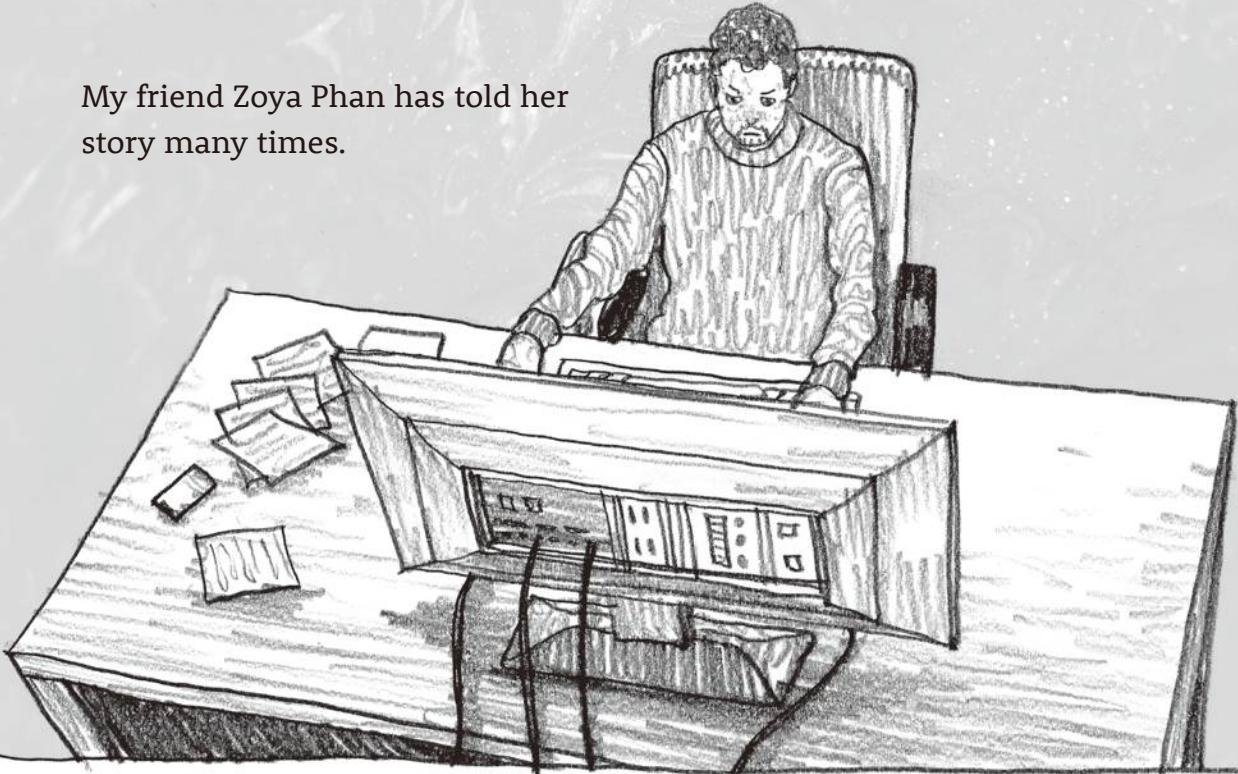
In the border regions, home to most of these minorities, the Burmese army acts like an occupying force.

They impose forced labour, destroy villages, and rape and murder civilians.



This violence has plagued families over generations.

My friend Zoya Phan has told her story many times.





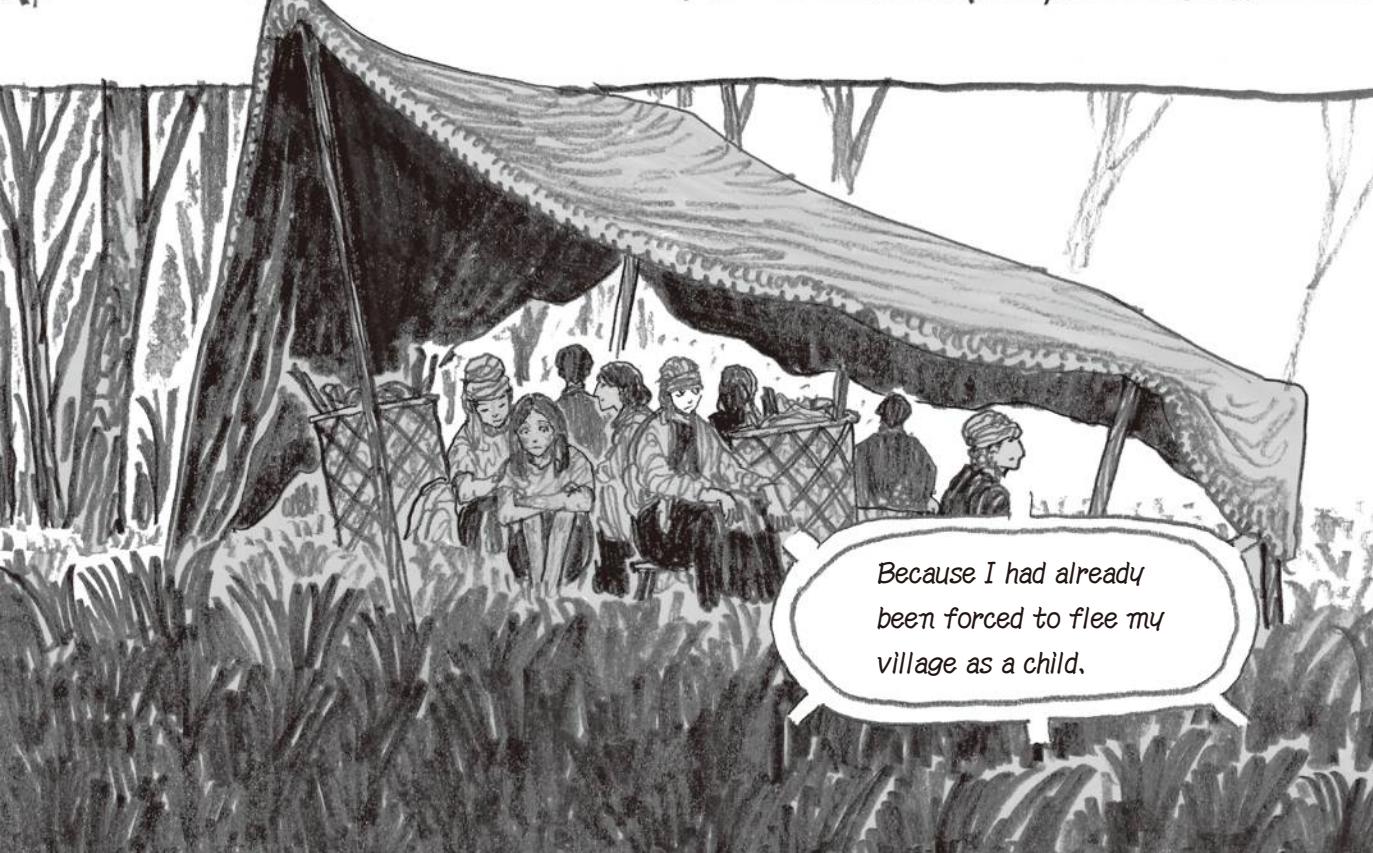
I was sitting doing my homework in my village in Karen State, in the eastern part of Myanmar.

When suddenly, without warning, we heard explosions and the crackling of gunfire.

The Burmese army was attacking us.

I was frozen in fear, I didn't know what to do.

but then I thought:  
“Oh no, not again!”





I can't properly describe how  
terrifying it was to run for  
your life with mortar bombs  
landing all around you,

or how the force of the  
explosions would knock  
you off your feet,

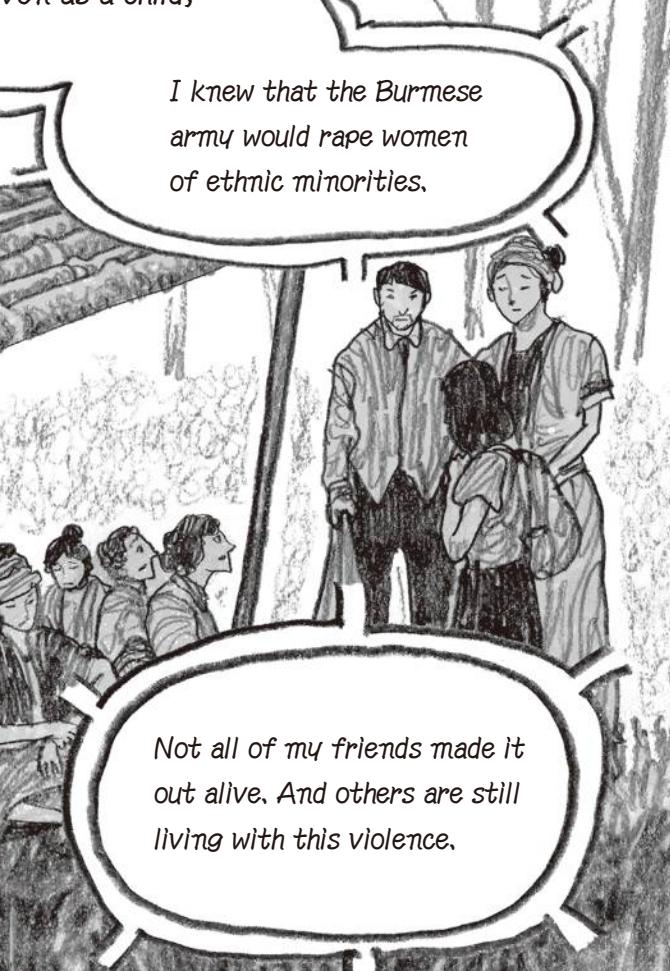
or the chaos and screams  
as people tried to grab  
their children and run.



but there was something more frightening than dying; being caught.



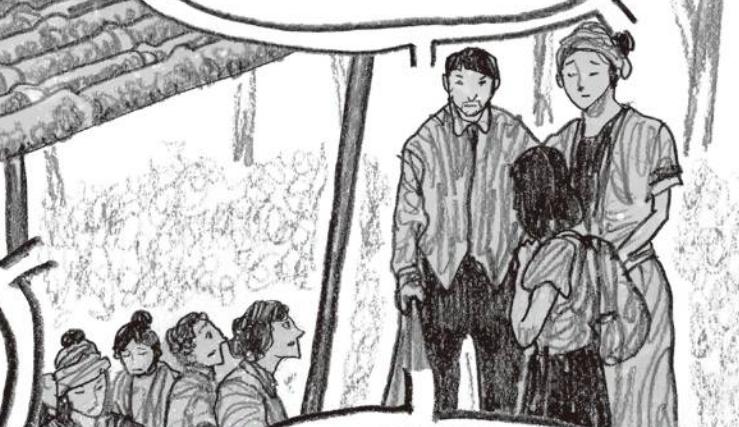
Even as a child,



I knew that the Burmese army would rape women of ethnic minorities.



I was very lucky. I escaped and, for the second time in my life, I ended up back in a refugee camp.



Not all of my friends made it out alive. And others are still living with this violence.



People like Zoya often  
owe their lives

to the ethnic armed  
organisations fighting the  
Burmese army.

These conflicts have been  
going on for decades.

On one side, minority  
representatives continue  
to demand a federal state.

On the other, the army tries  
to quash them and attacks  
civilians.

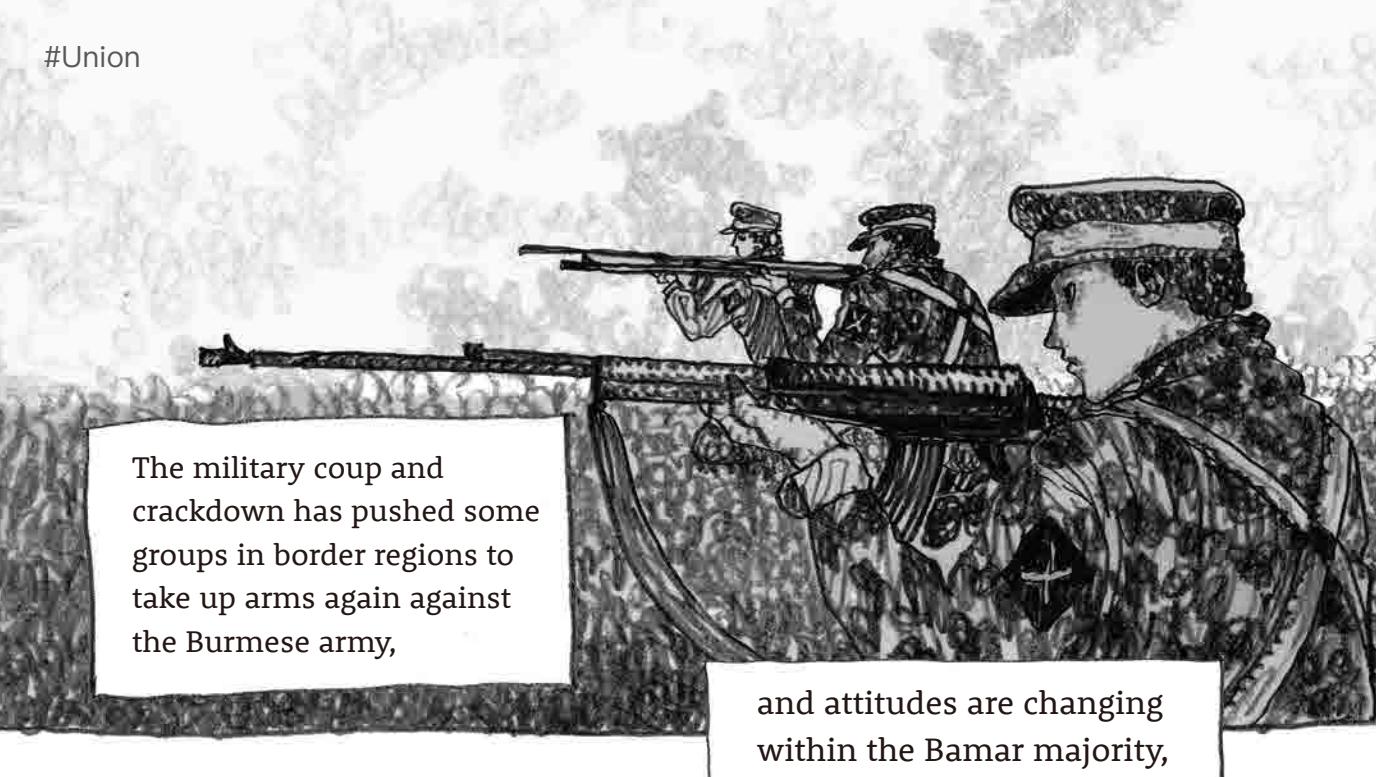
*Even during the so-called  
reform period of the 2010s,  
tanks and military vehicles  
still roamed our streets.*



The Burmese army  
will not accept  
the reality of our  
country's ethnic and  
religious diversity,

and we will never accept  
their oppression or let  
them destroy our cultures.





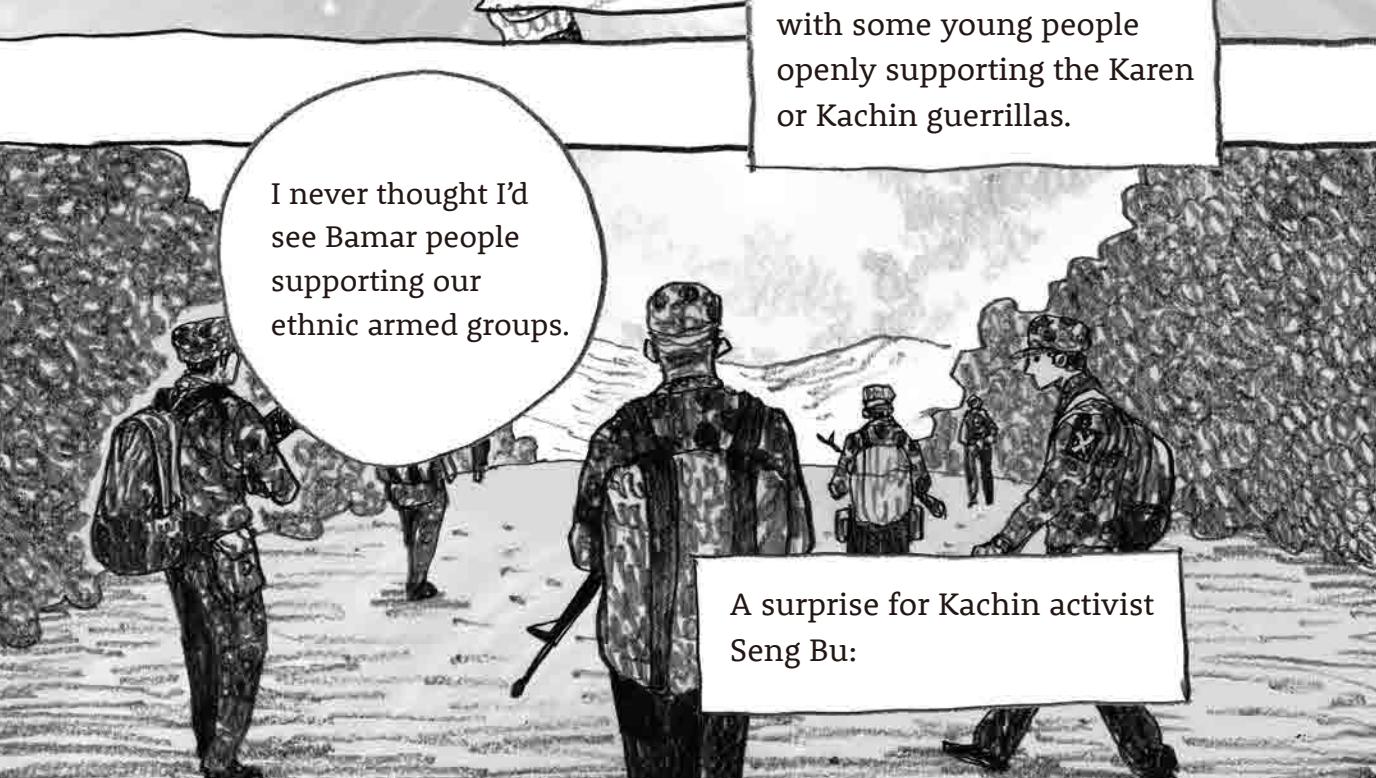
The military coup and crackdown has pushed some groups in border regions to take up arms again against the Burmese army,

and attitudes are changing within the Bamar majority,

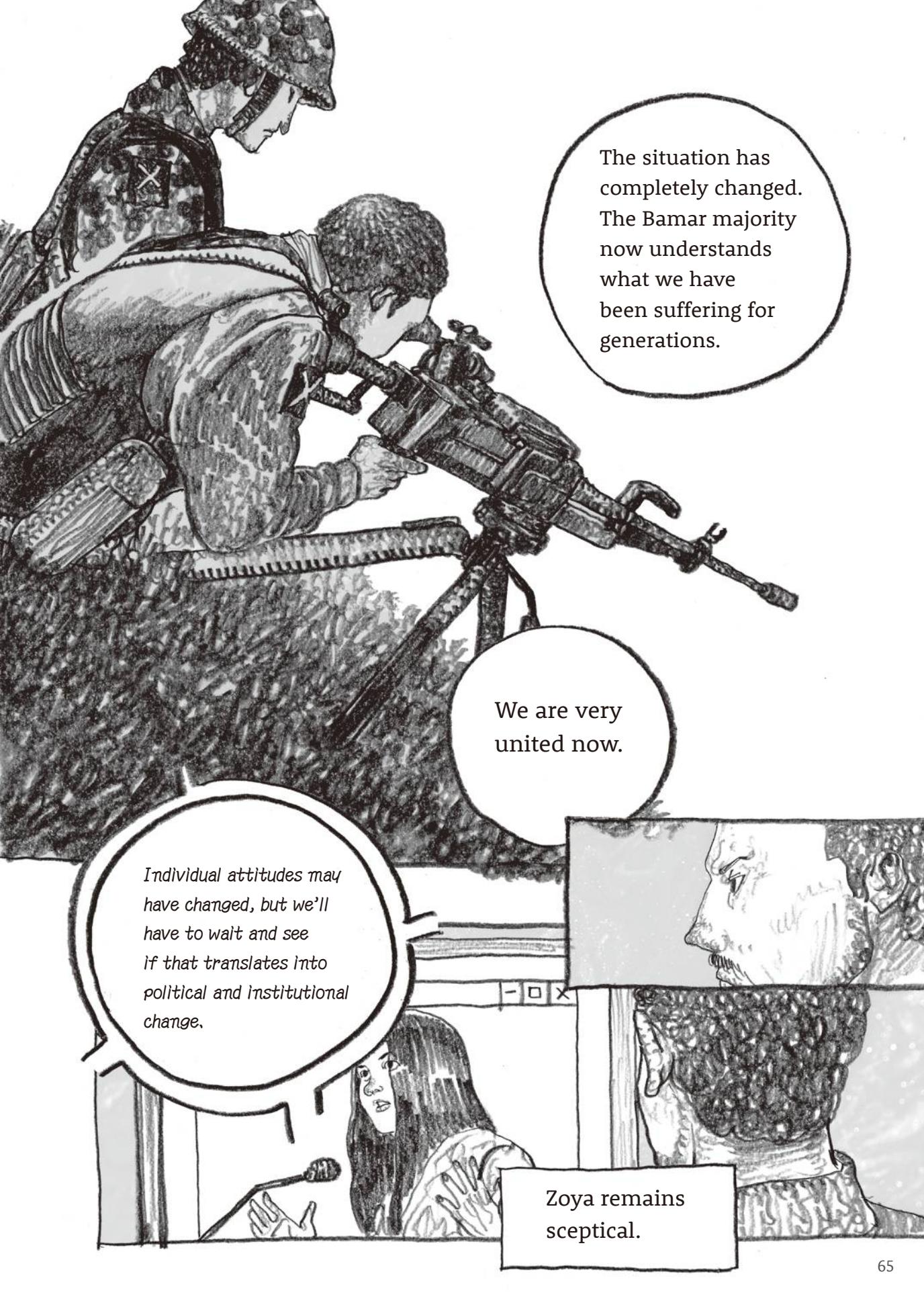


I never thought I'd see Bamar people supporting our ethnic armed groups.

with some young people openly supporting the Karen or Kachin guerrillas.



A surprise for Kachin activist Seng Bu:

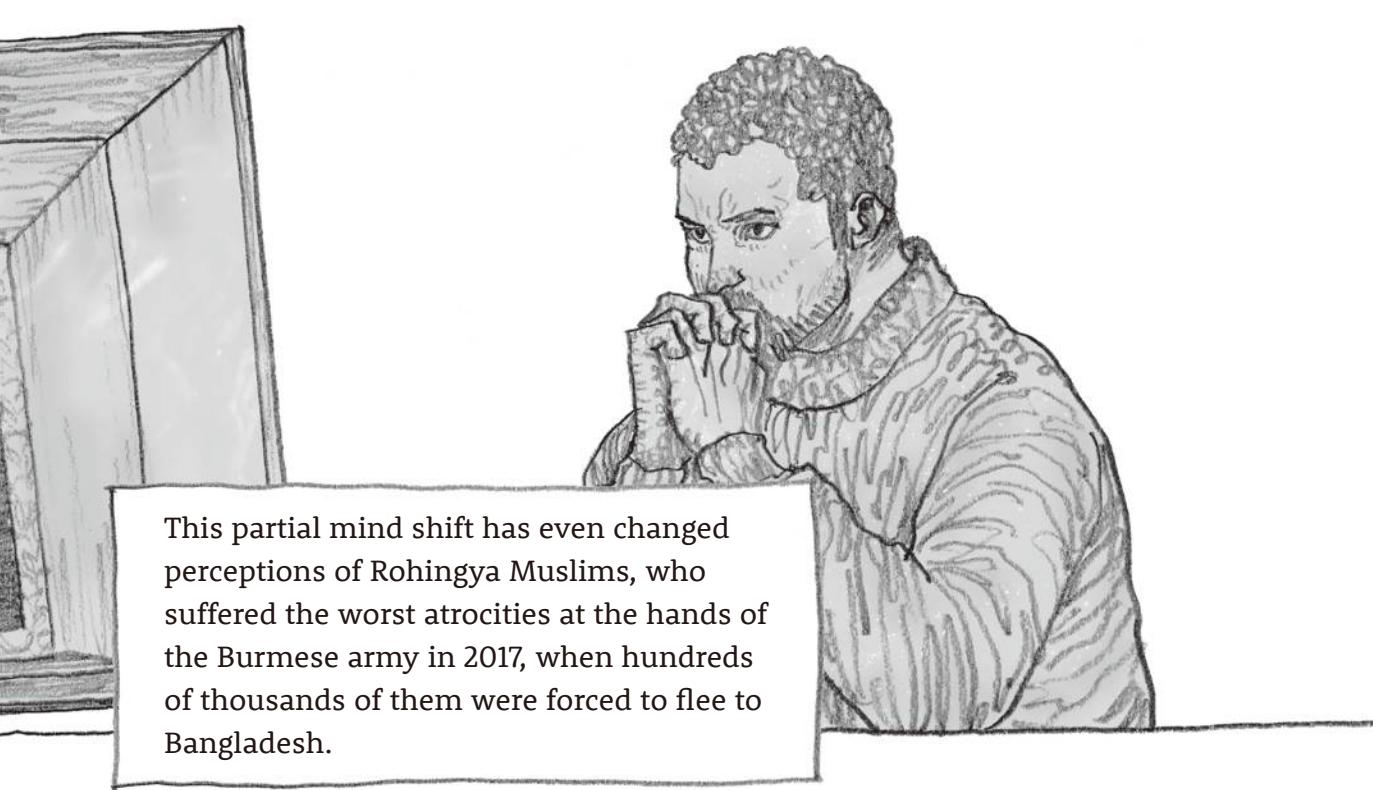


The situation has completely changed. The Bamar majority now understands what we have been suffering for generations.

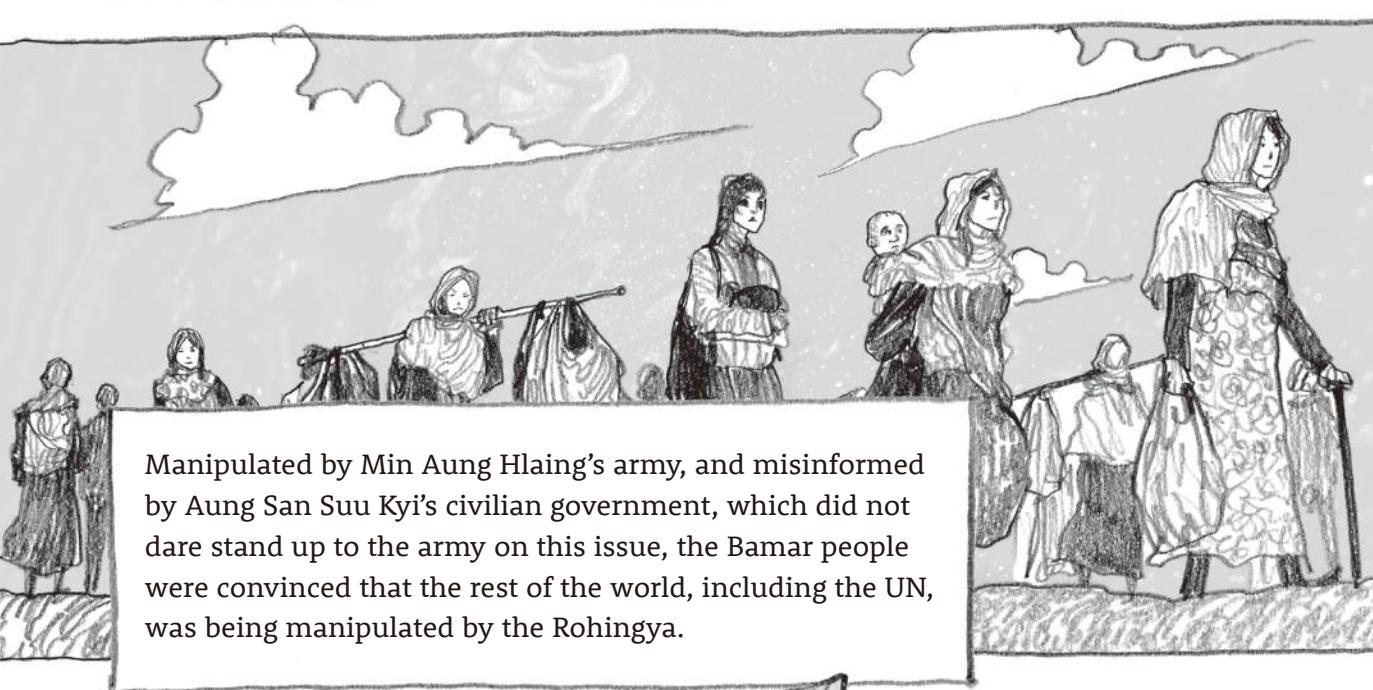
We are very united now.

Individual attitudes may have changed, but we'll have to wait and see if that translates into political and institutional change.

Zoya remains sceptical.

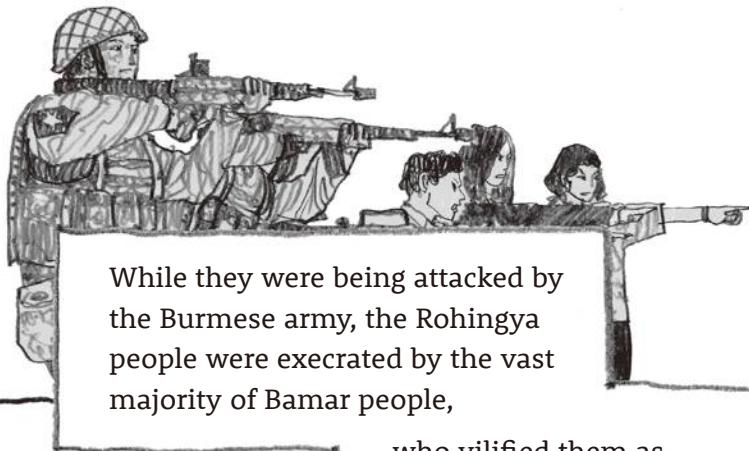


This partial mind shift has even changed perceptions of Rohingya Muslims, who suffered the worst atrocities at the hands of the Burmese army in 2017, when hundreds of thousands of them were forced to flee to Bangladesh.



Manipulated by Min Aung Hlaing's army, and misinformed by Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government, which did not dare stand up to the army on this issue, the Bamar people were convinced that the rest of the world, including the UN, was being manipulated by the Rohingya.





While they were being attacked by the Burmese army, the Rohingya people were execrated by the vast majority of Bamar people,

who vilified them as terrorists and liars and even held protests against them.



In the words of a young Bamar man:



I realized I had been racist.

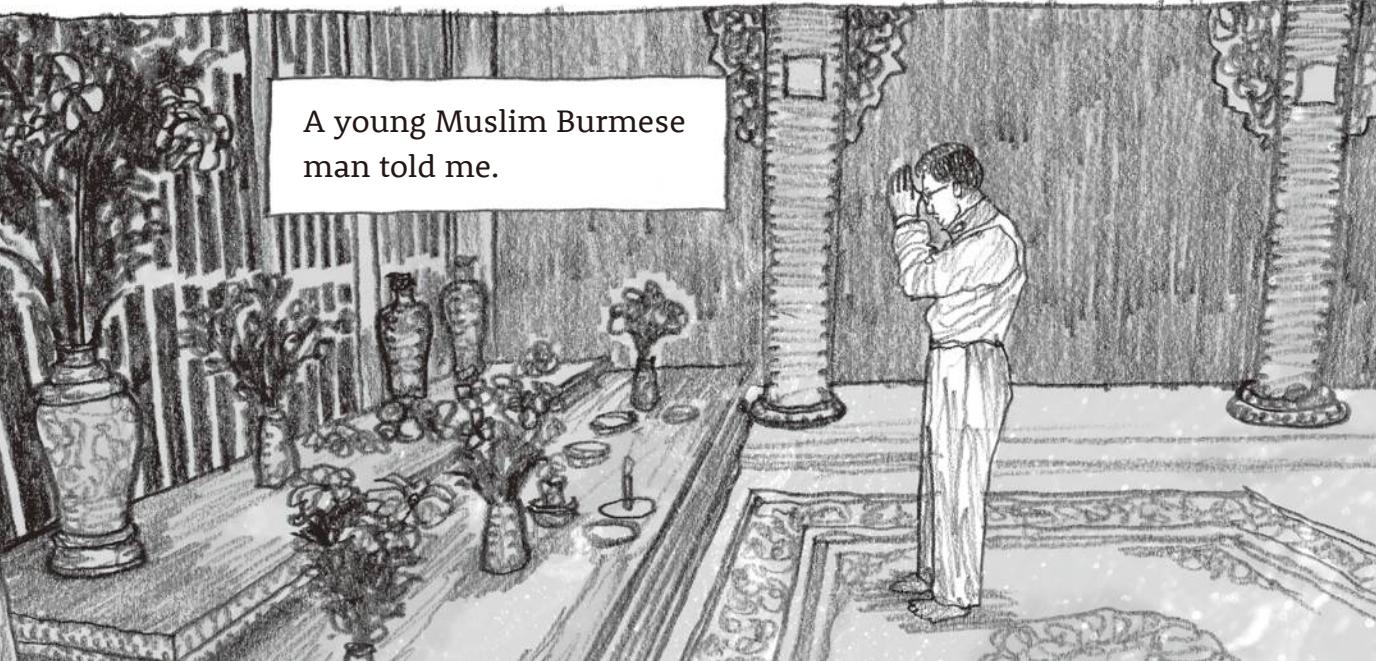
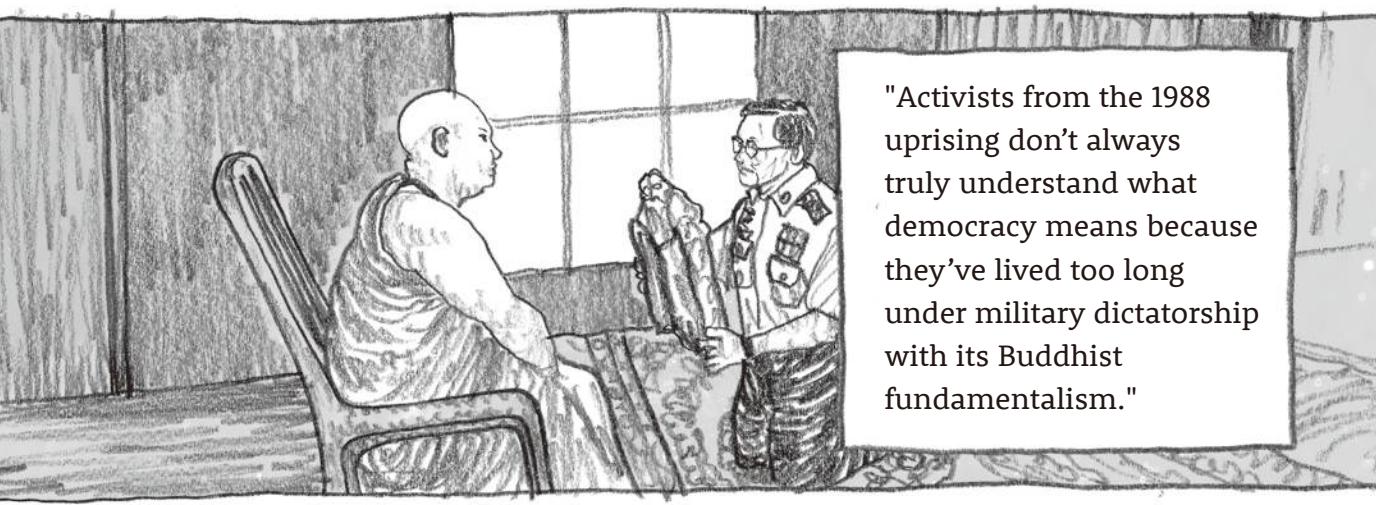
We were badmouthing the UN, blaming them for wanting to destabilise our government with their criticism on the Rohingya issue.

Now we are looking to them for help.





The fear and hatred for Muslims has even penetrated the pro-democracy movement.

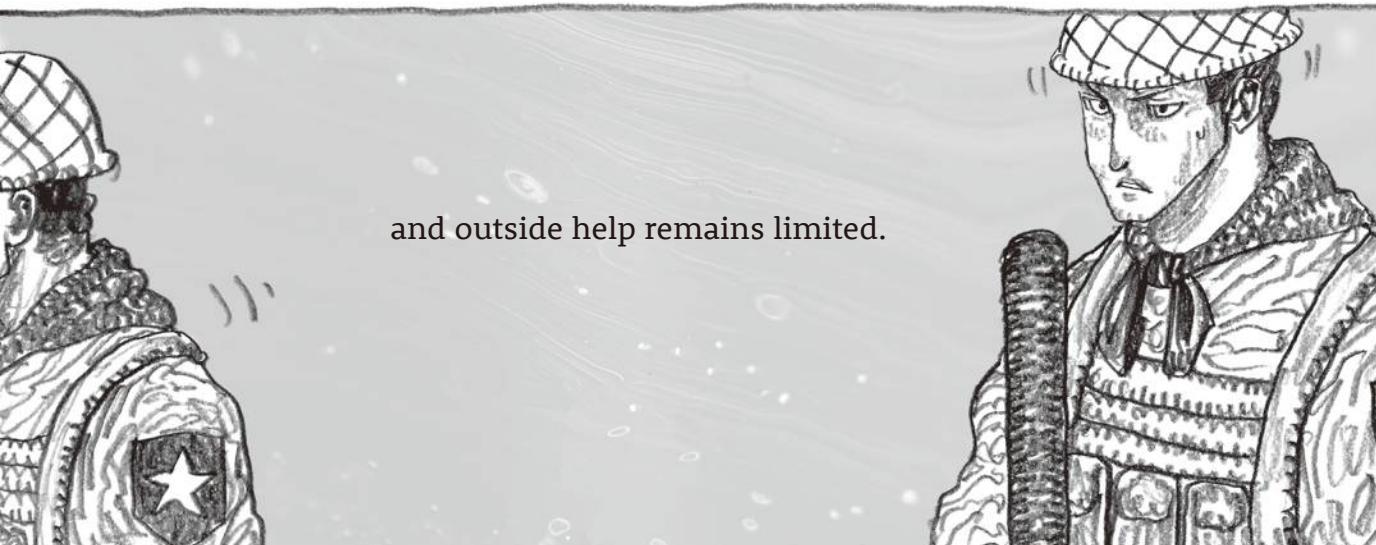
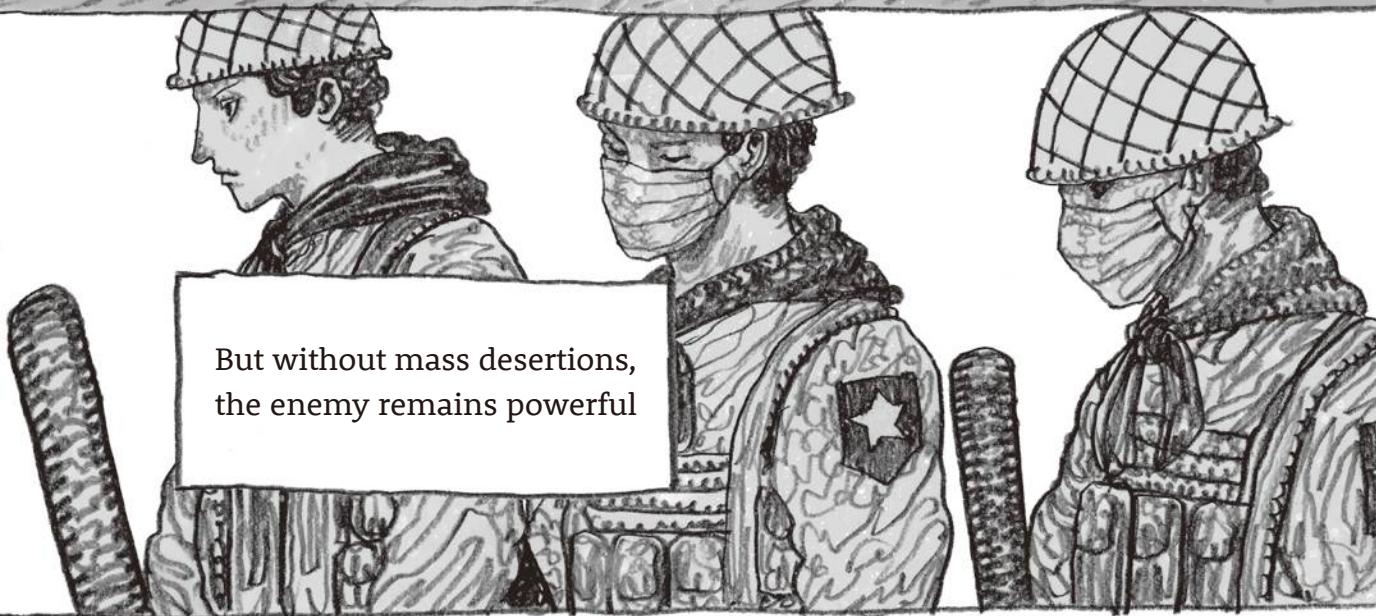


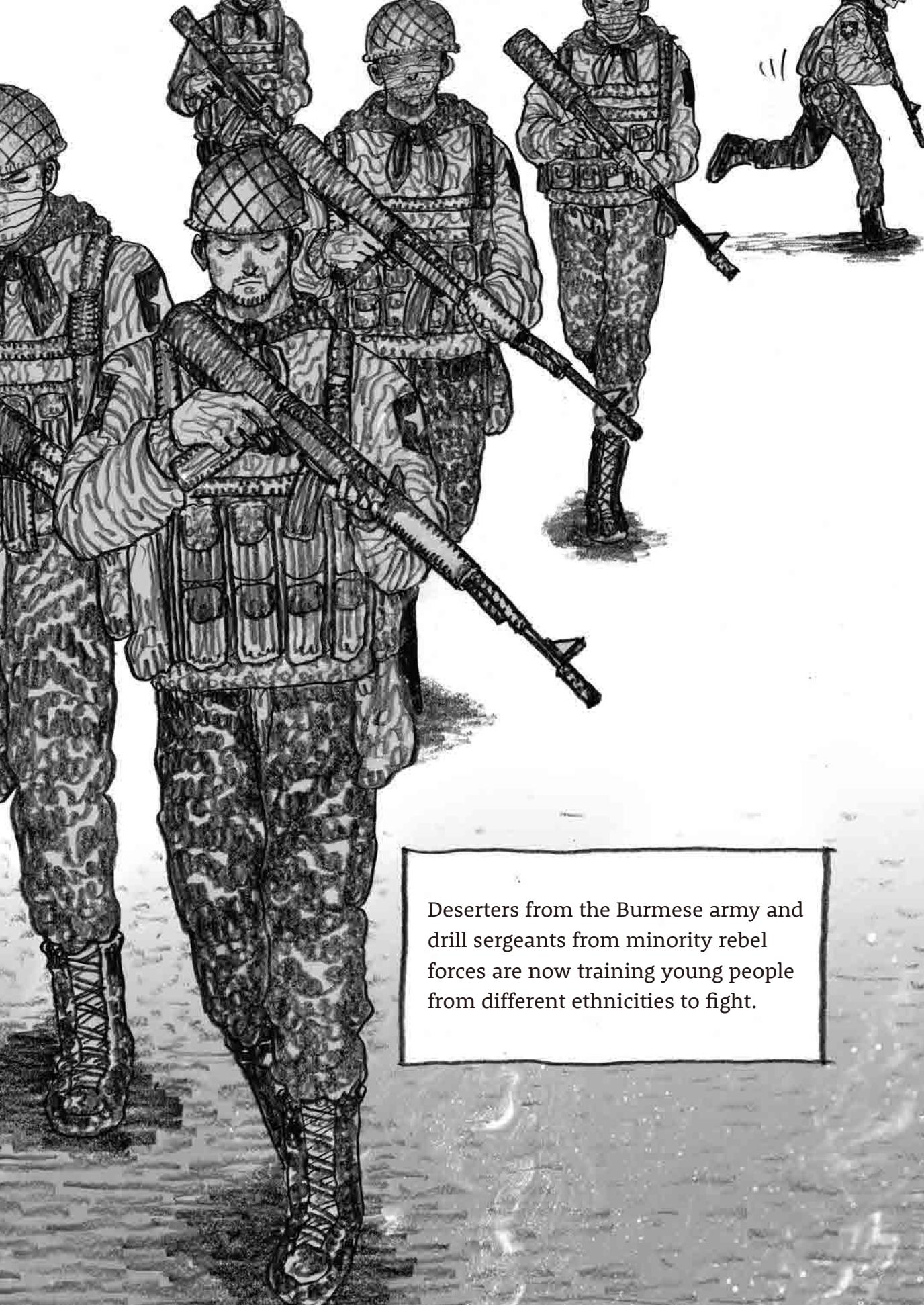
#SolidarityShortfall1





... is now more united.





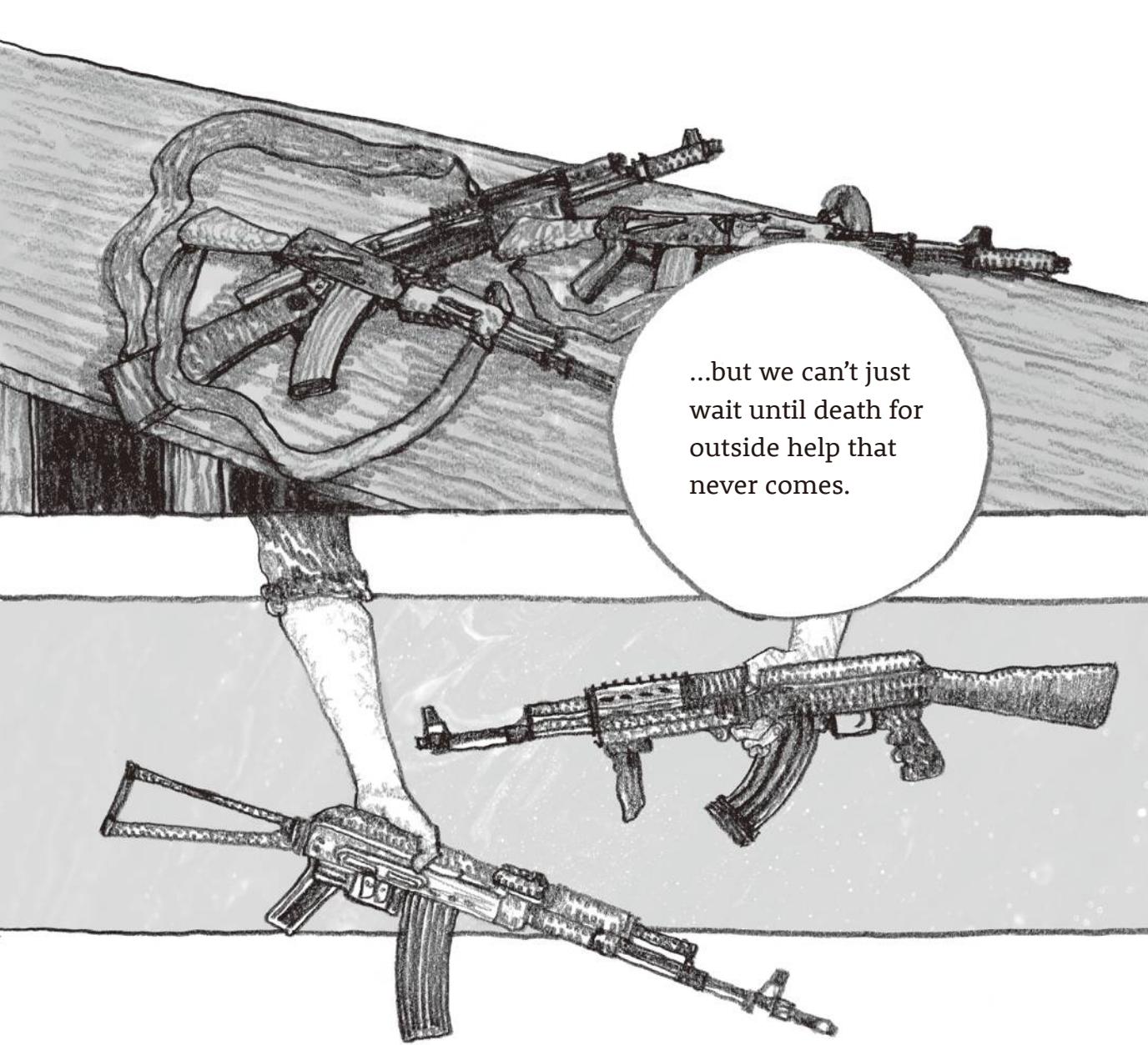
Deserters from the Burmese army and drill sergeants from minority rebel forces are now training young people from different ethnicities to fight.

Gum Tun, a young  
Kachin living in  
Yangon.

The world is  
just watching

while terror  
is shaking  
Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi  
would never support  
violence....



...but we can't just  
wait until death for  
outside help that  
never comes.

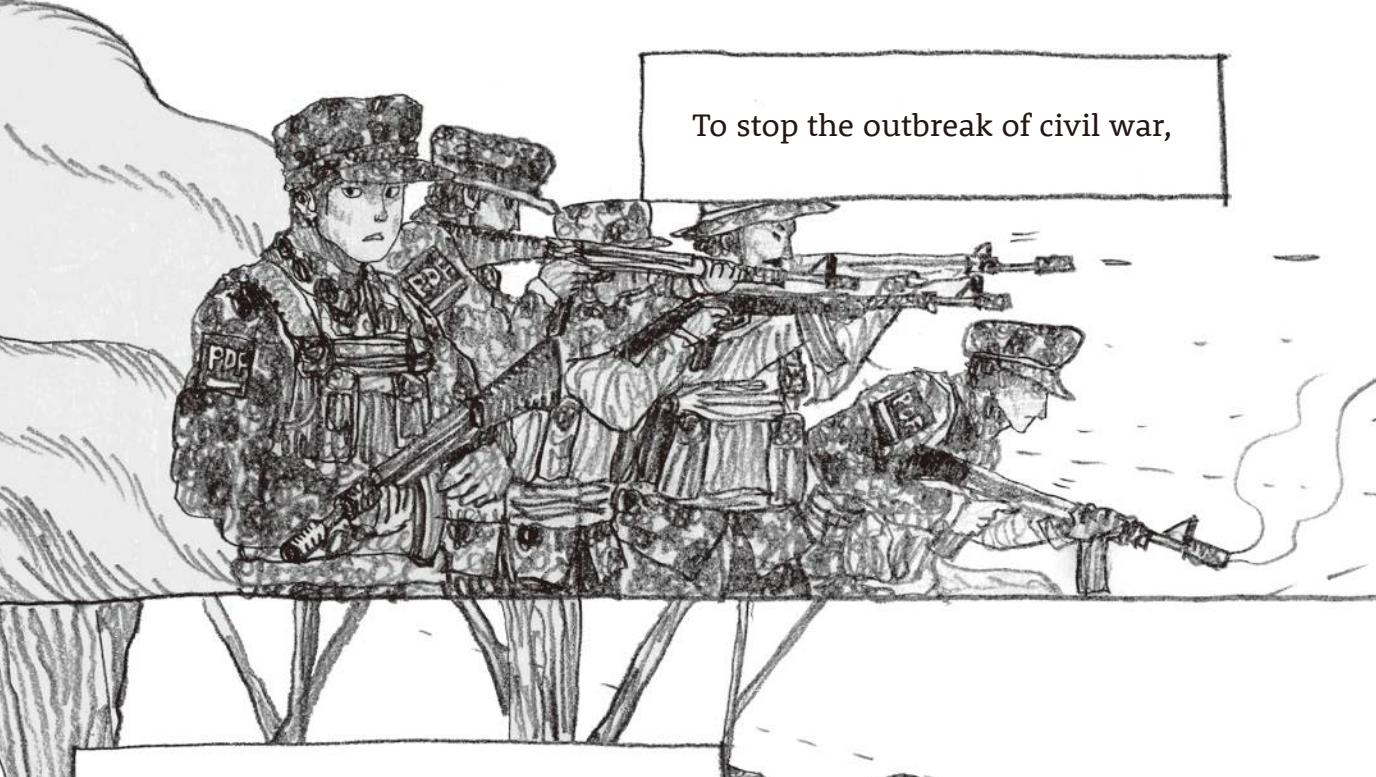
If the U.N. had  
responded more  
quickly,



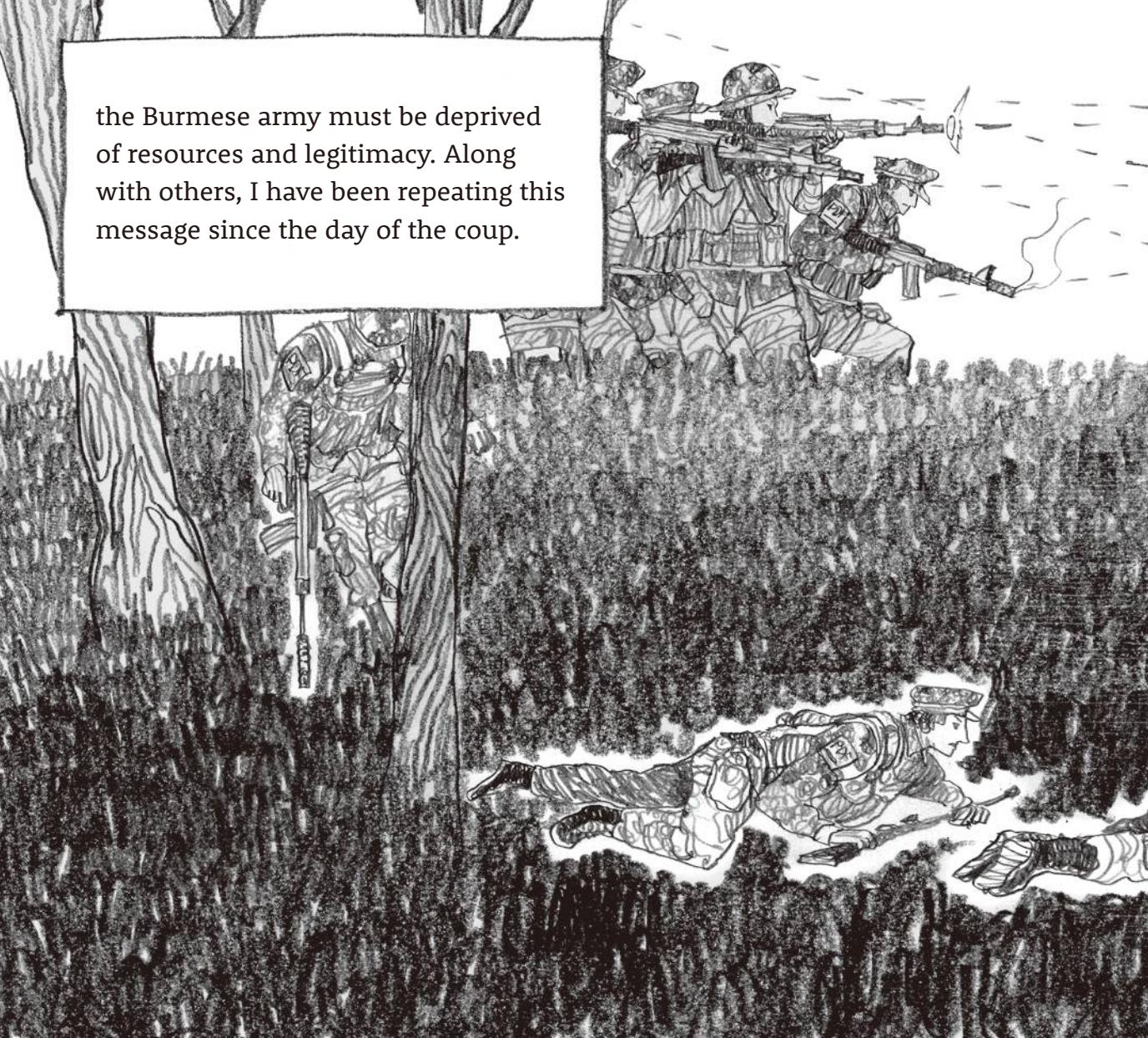
there would have been no  
People's Defence Forces.

\* 這支人民防衛軍的大部分成員，都是沒有任何軍事經驗的年輕人。

\* the majority of soldiers in the PDF are young people with no prior military experience.

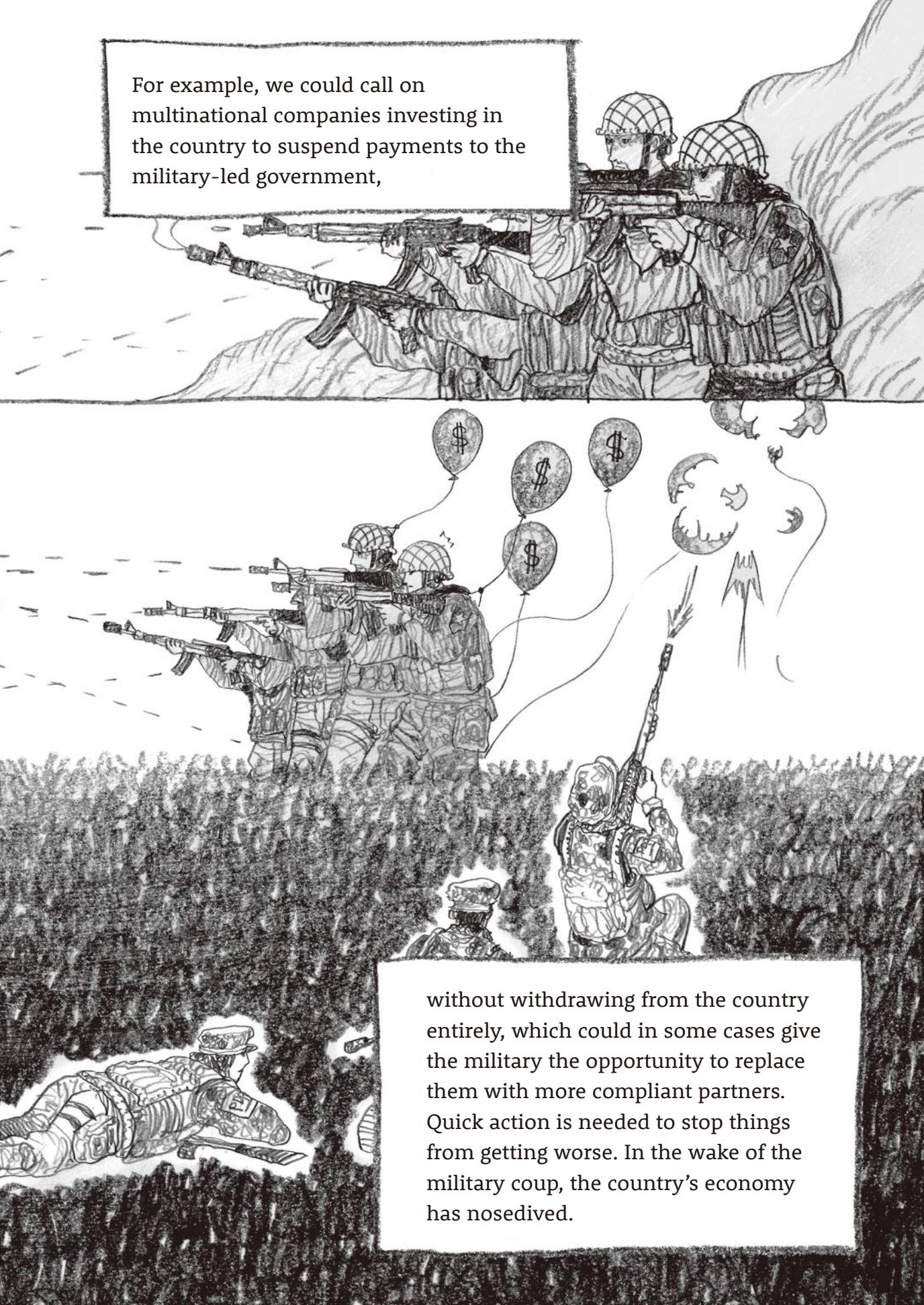


To stop the outbreak of civil war,

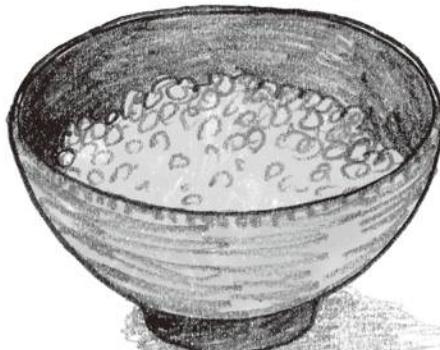


the Burmese army must be deprived of resources and legitimacy. Along with others, I have been repeating this message since the day of the coup.

For example, we could call on multinational companies investing in the country to suspend payments to the military-led government,



without withdrawing from the country entirely, which could in some cases give the military the opportunity to replace them with more compliant partners. Quick action is needed to stop things from getting worse. In the wake of the military coup, the country's economy has nosedived.



Now we  
only eat one  
meal a day.

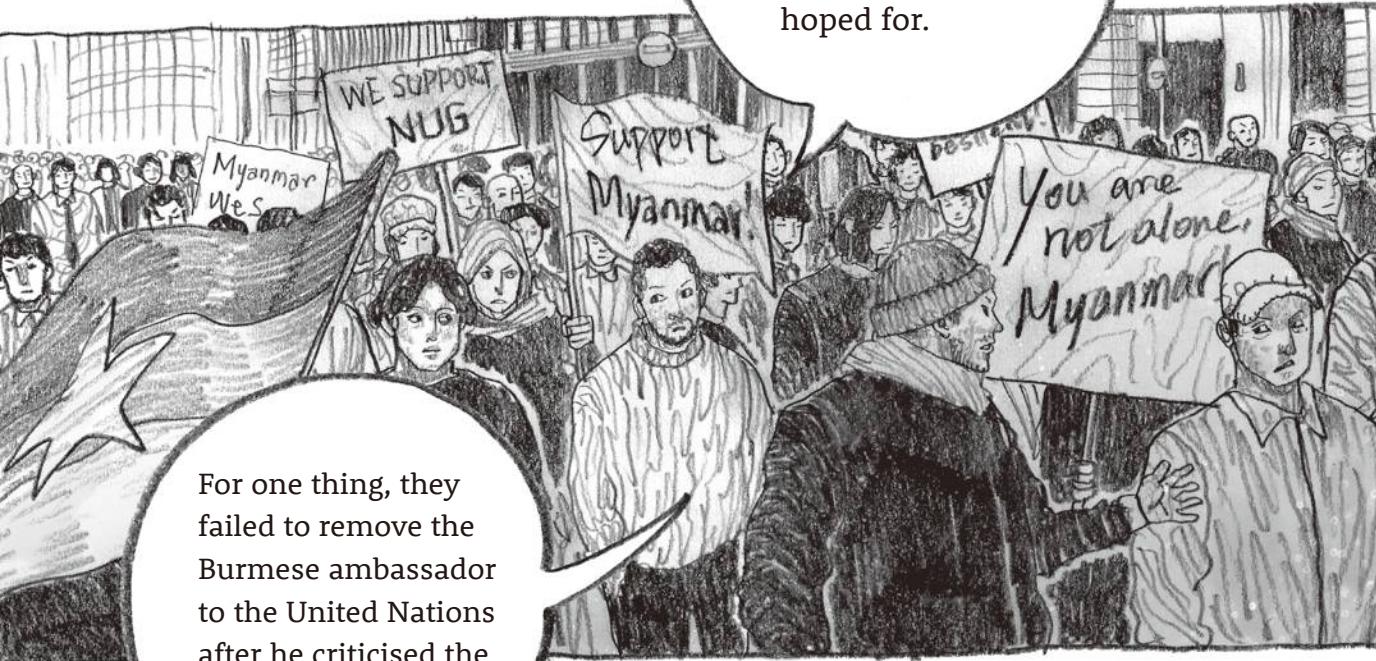


I don't want  
my family to  
go hungry.

A 26 year-old worker  
who lost his night job at a  
factory due to the curfew.



In urban areas,  
unemployment is rising, and  
so is the cost of food.



For one thing, they failed to remove the Burmese ambassador to the United Nations after he criticised the coup,

much to the annoyance of the putschist generals.

Also,





the new National Unity Government (NUG), which rightly sees itself as more legitimate than the army to represent Myanmar internationally,

is gaining some traction.



The NUG is certainly more representative than any previous Burmese government. It was founded following the military coup by politicians from the National League for Democracy and other sections of society.

It is made up of a people from a wide range of ethnicities and all generations, a third of its ministers are women.

An LGBT+ activist is the minister for human rights,



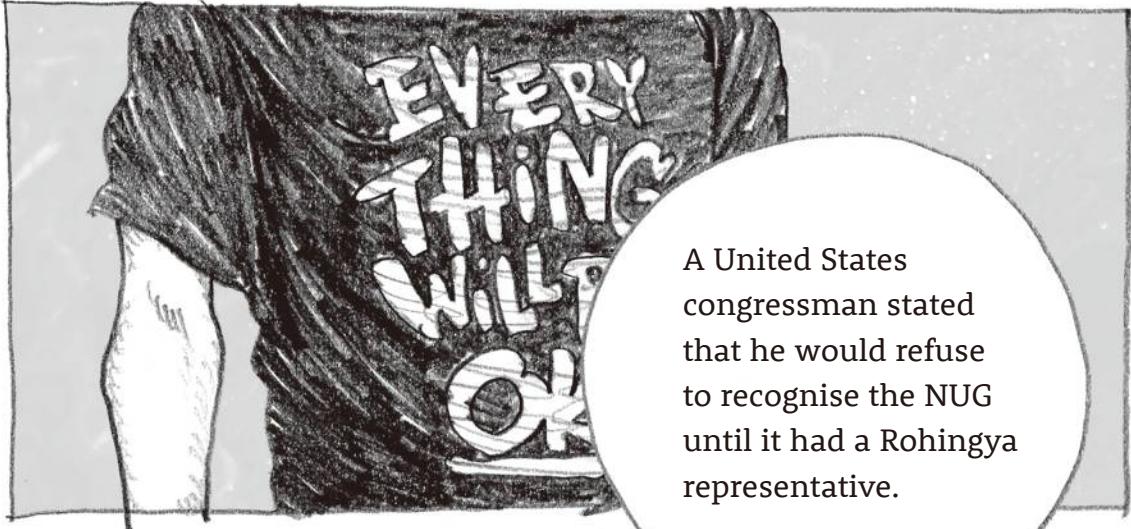
and an activist who spoke out for the rights of the Rohingya people when the rest of the country was against them, is tasked with women's and youth affairs.



While this government is forced to operate in exile and secrecy, and does not enjoy universal popularity – some of the ethnic armed groups organisations have withheld their support,

it does provide a real alternative to the military junta.





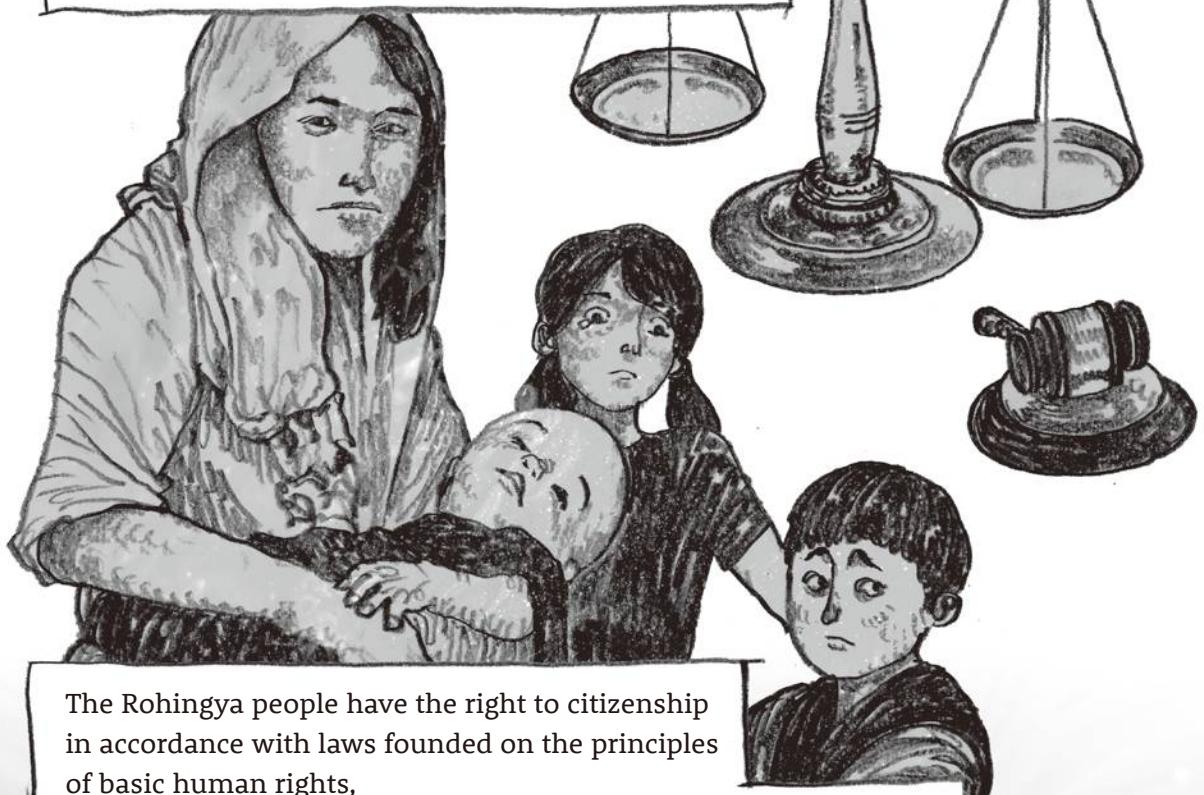
A United States congressman stated that he would refuse to recognise the NUG until it had a Rohingya representative.

Perhaps he didn't know that it would be virtually impossible for all the country's multitude of minorities to be represented in one government.

But given how the Rohingya have been particularly targeted in Myanmar, including by pro-democracy activists, this outside pressure was welcomed.

The NUG finally released a statement clarifying its position:

The National Unity Government is fully aware of the violence and gross human rights violations inflicted upon the Rohingya people by an army of thugs, and of the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from this minority, who have been forced to flee their homes during the course of the last few decades. We are deeply saddened by this situation.



The Rohingya people have the right to citizenship in accordance with laws founded on the principles of basic human rights,

federalism and democracy.

Voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation for Rohingya people, is an issue of vital importance.



The Burmese army, an institution which for decades has claimed to promote national unity,

has finally managed to unite the country...

against itself.



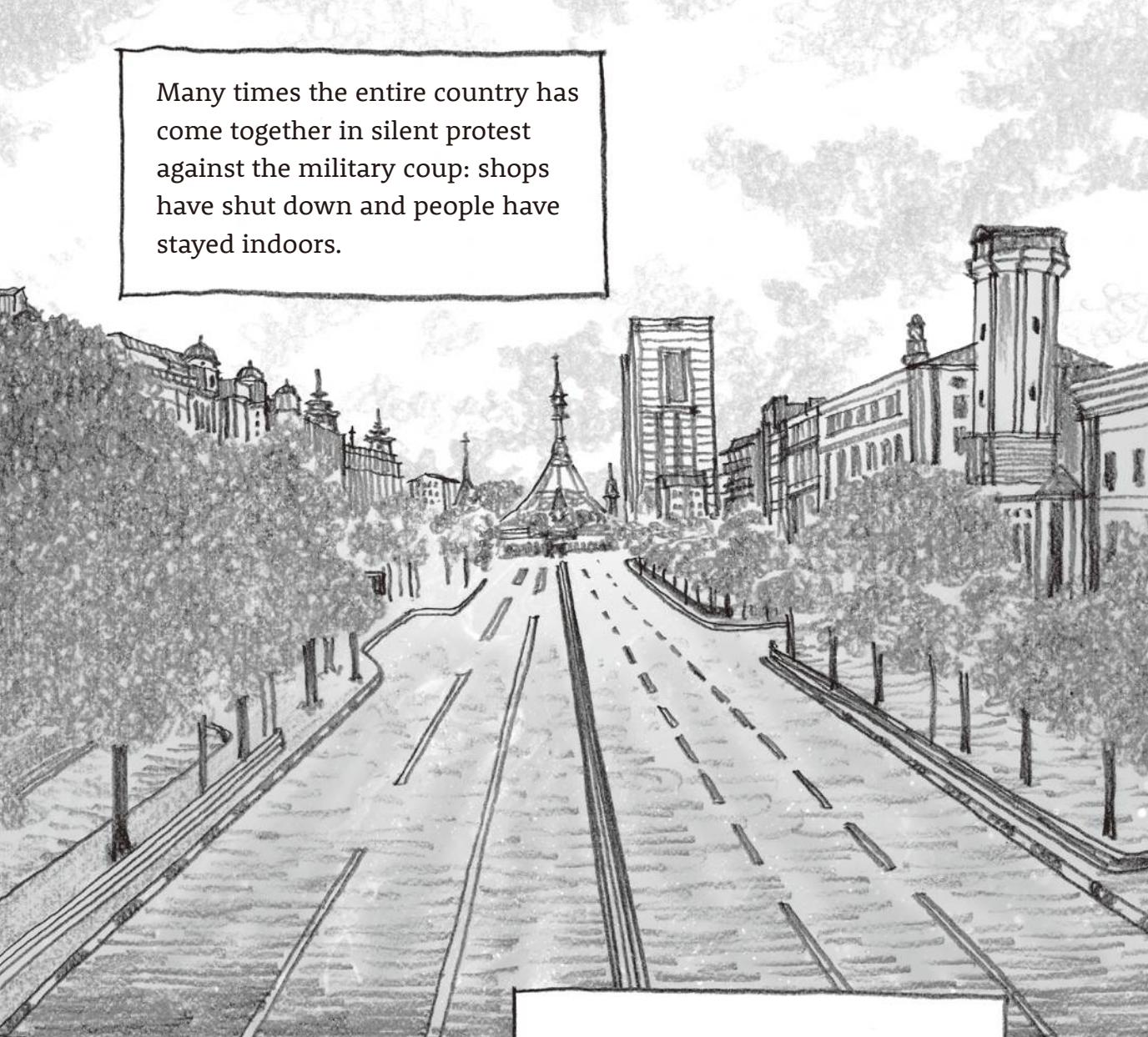
But



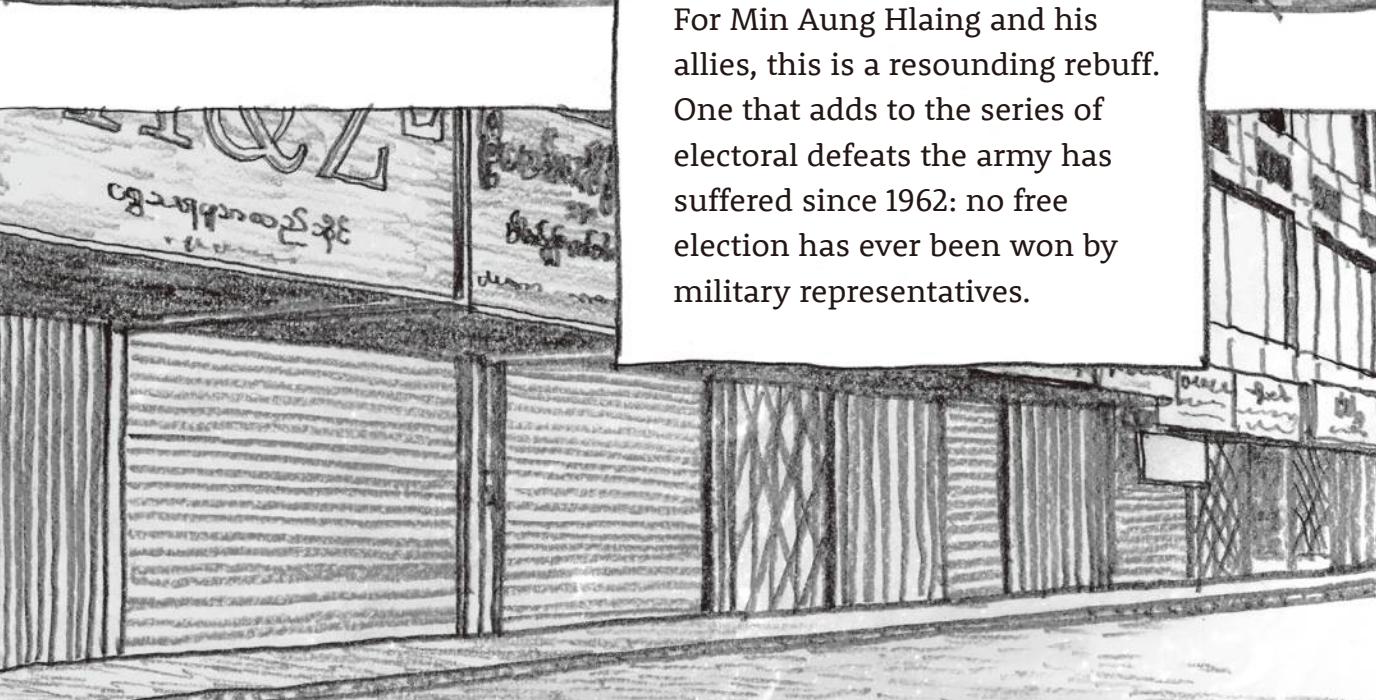
can this fragile, new unity



survive another  
army victory?

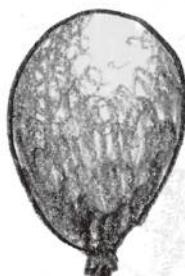
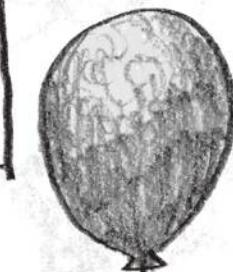


Many times the entire country has come together in silent protest against the military coup: shops have shut down and people have stayed indoors.



For Min Aung Hlaing and his allies, this is a resounding rebuff. One that adds to the series of electoral defeats the army has suffered since 1962: no free election has ever been won by military representatives.

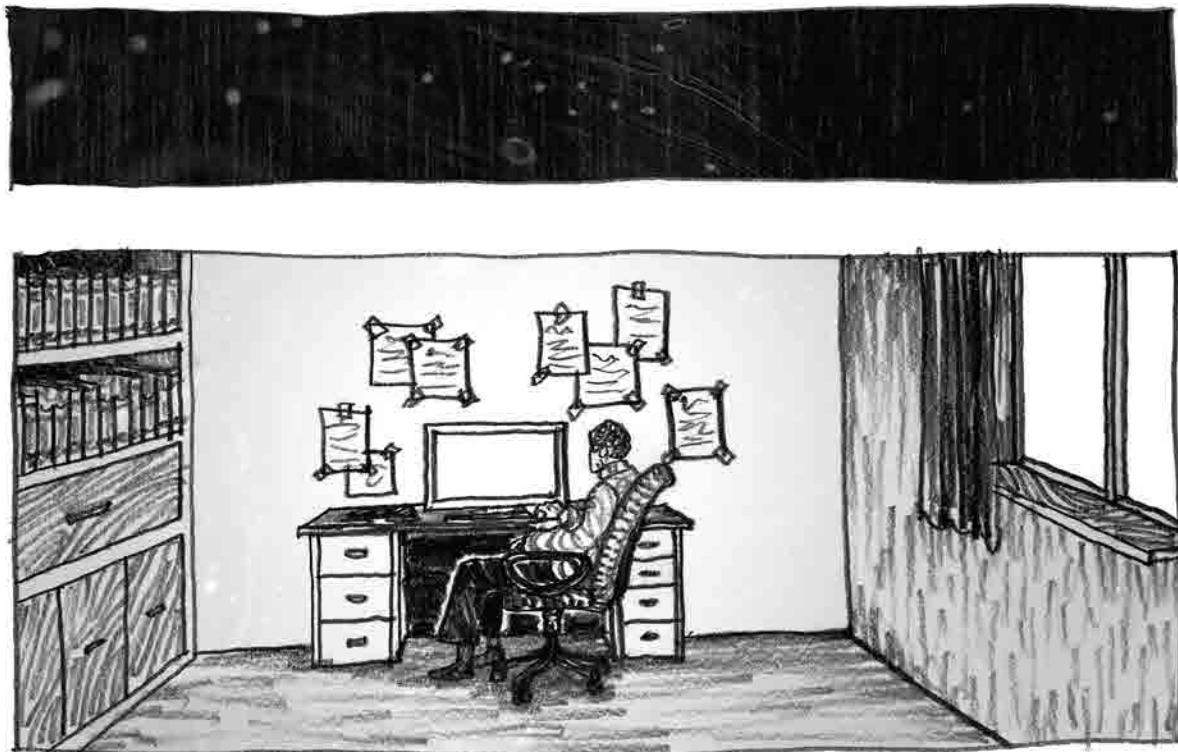
But the pressures of life under military rule could revive tensions within the country's population.



So the clock is ticking. And the Burmese people have realised that they must take things into their own hands.



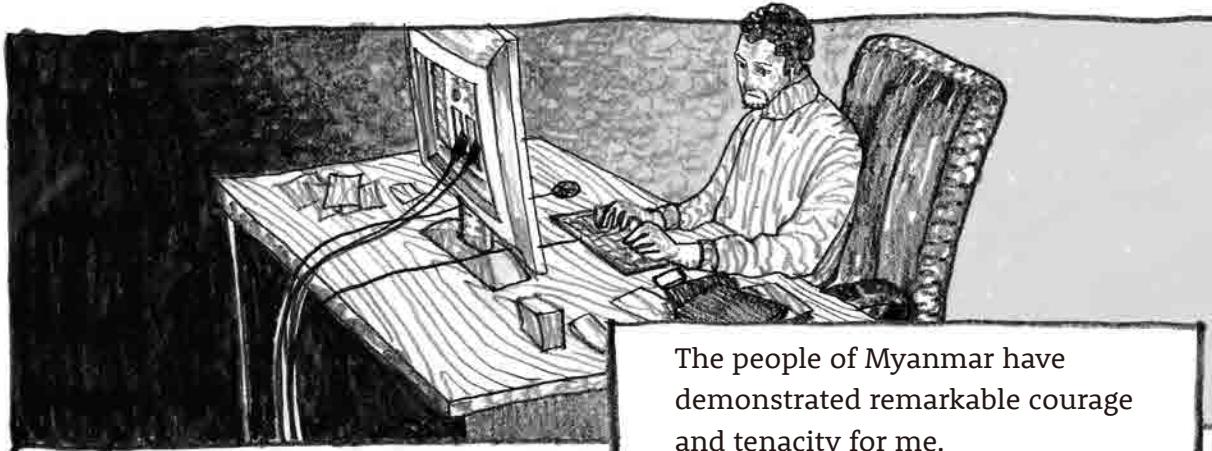
#EverythingWillBeOK



After a few months  
of frenetic calls from  
journalists,

my phone has almost  
stopped ringing.

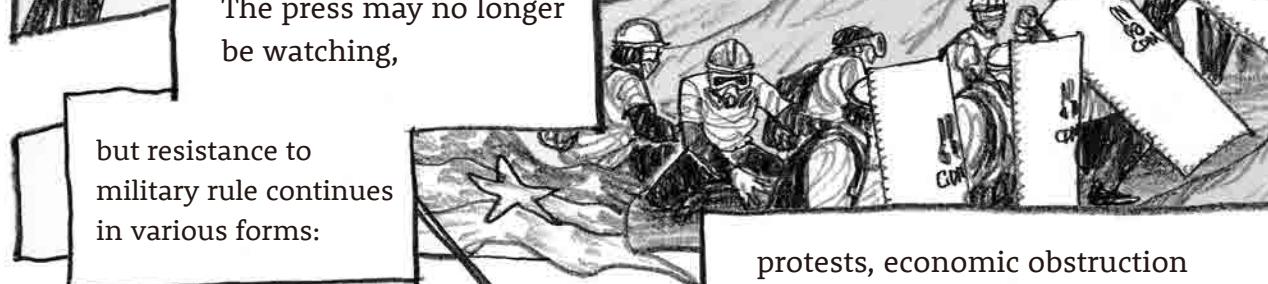




The people of Myanmar have demonstrated remarkable courage and tenacity for me.

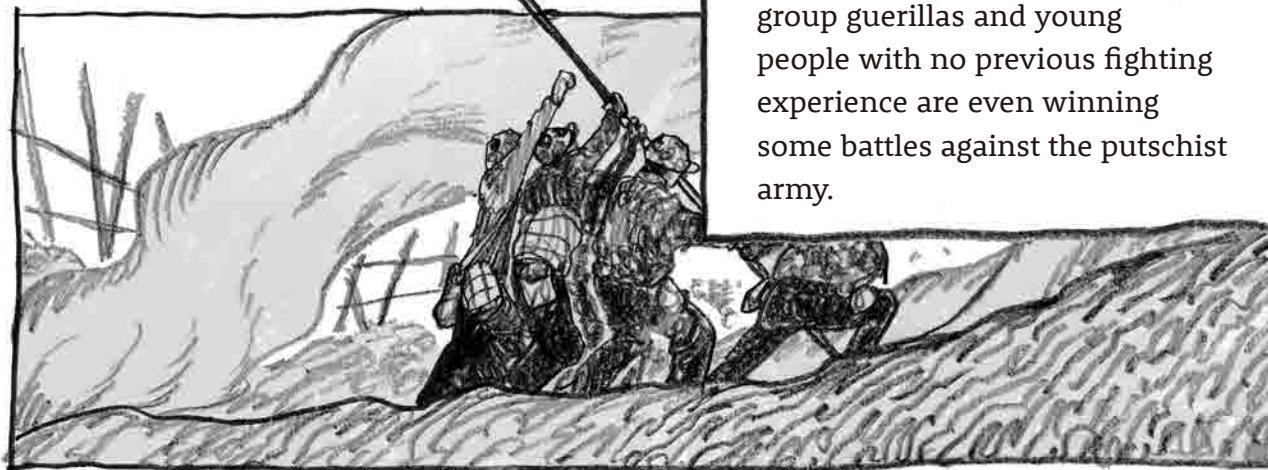


The press may no longer be watching,



but resistance to military rule continues in various forms:

protests, economic obstruction and armed combat. The minority group guerillas and young people with no previous fighting experience are even winning some battles against the putschist army.



I read the words of 20-year-old Fox:



"Everyone is scared of being hurt or being killed,

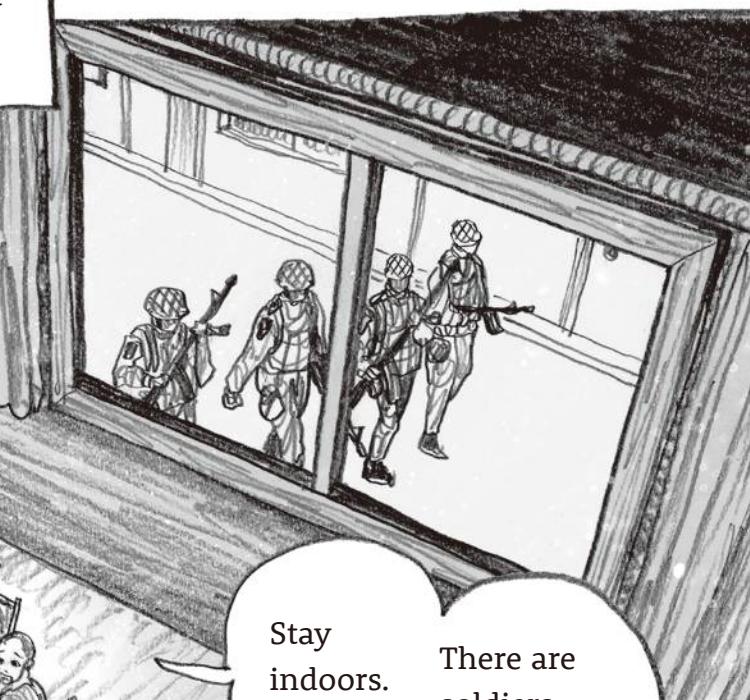
...but at the same time it's scarier to think about what the military would do if they win this."



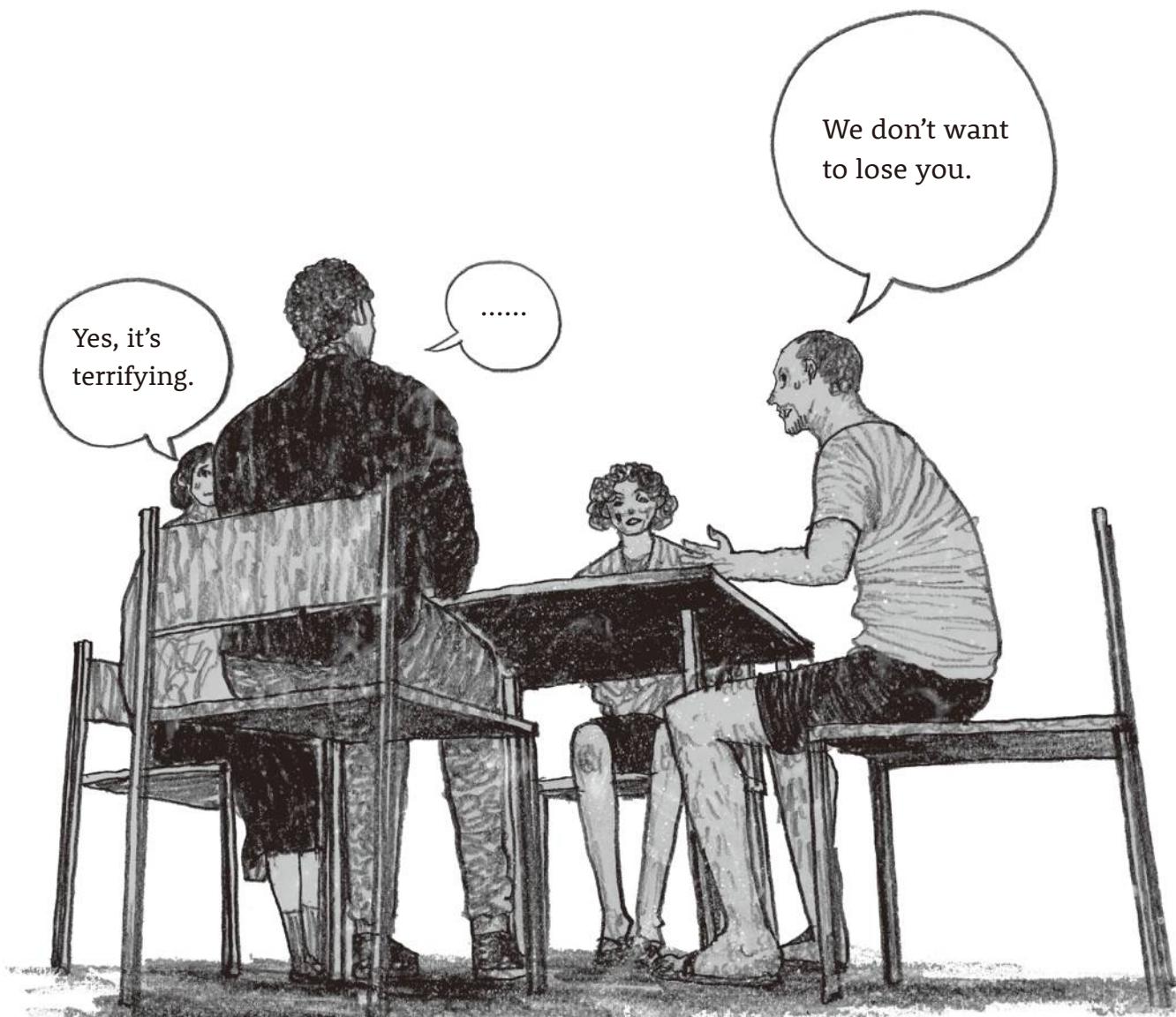
You were out late again.

Stay indoors.

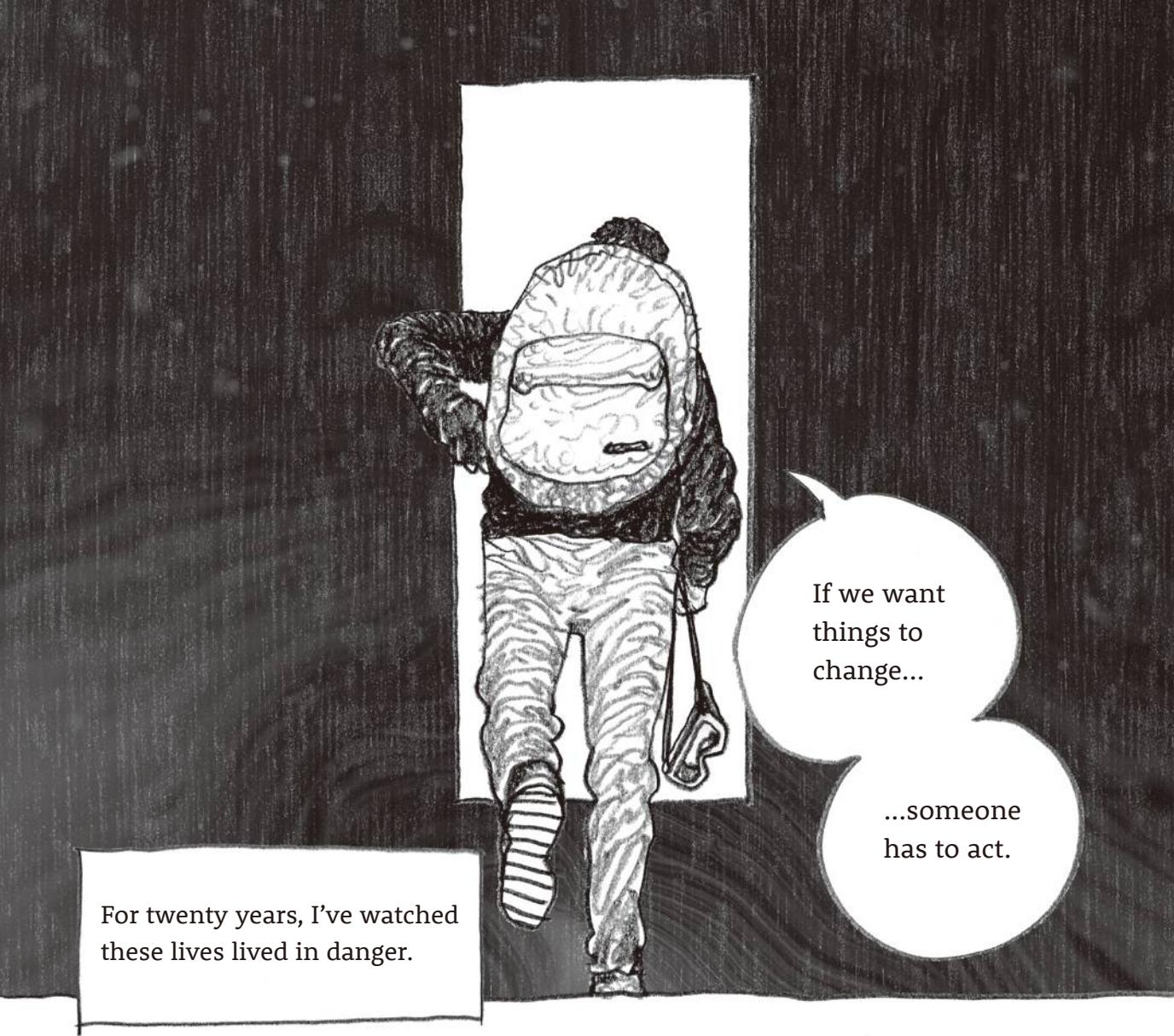
There are soldiers everywhere.



"And that's what the older generation don't get at the moment, they keep saying: 'No, don't go out now, it's dangerous'



but if we don't go out now and fight for this, it's going to be dangerous for the rest of our lives."



For twenty years, I've watched  
these lives lived in danger.

If we want  
things to  
change...

...someone  
has to act.

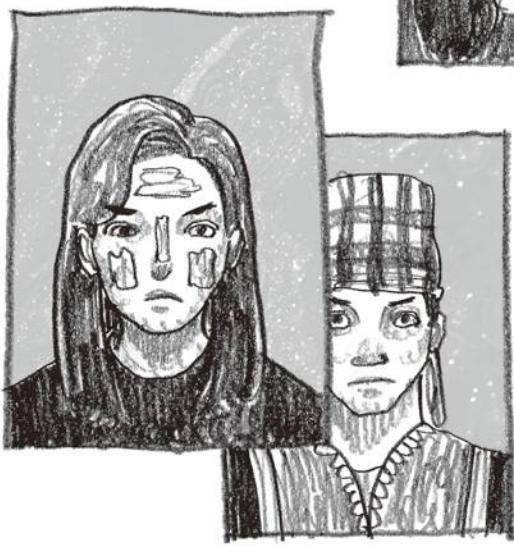


I can't stand by  
and do nothing.

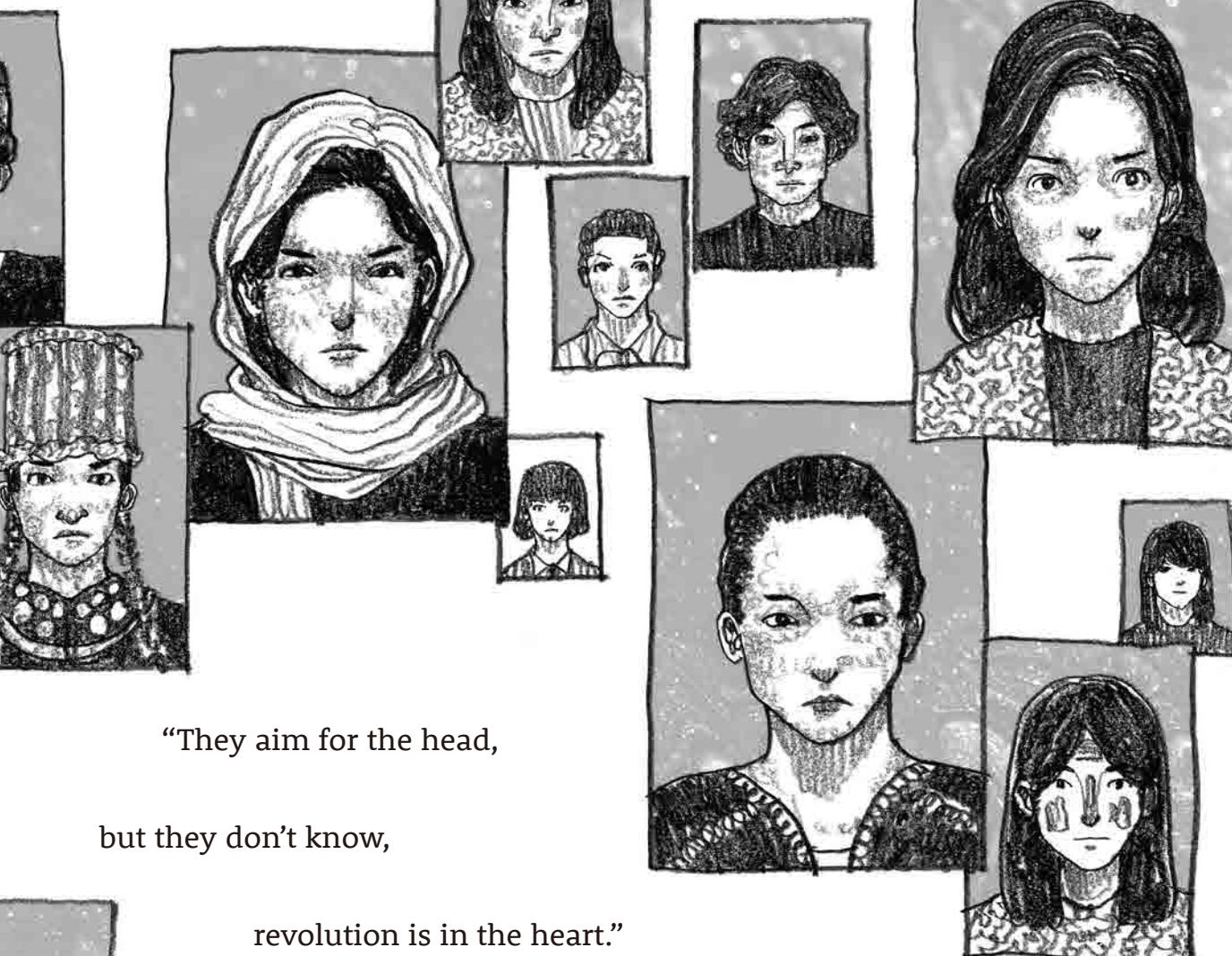
And I've witnessed  
the courage and  
dignity of a people.











“They aim for the head,  
but they don’t know,  
revolution is in the heart.”

— Khet Thi, Burmese poet, died on May 9, 2021 in custody after torture.

To my Burmese ex-girlfriend  
and to the only person I've ever wanted  
to think of as my little sister.

To Kyal Sin.

To everyone

Frédéric Debomy

Freedom is like air. Those who live under the shade of freedom take it for granted, and tend to forget how precious it truly is. I hope everyone can understand that there is always a cruel and heavy price to pay for freedom, and that we must always cherish it, for it has been bought with countless sacrifices.

Lau Kwong-Shing

# References

A book like this would not have been possible without accurate information. Frédéric therefore want to thank all those who continue to filter reliable information out of the country, including the journalists and press outlets who carry on risky investigative work in Myanmar. Some of the quotes in the book have been drawn from conversations he has had with various people. The words of Zoya Phan come in part from a speech she gave in Oslo in May of 2011, and the words of the character on pages 13 to 17 are inspired both by a conversation Frédéric had with a young Burmese man from Yangon, as well as a press article. He sourced other quotes from the articles listed below. Some of the words have been altered, but we have been careful not to change the meaning. To bring the story to life, Lau Kwong-Shing had the idea of putting the quotes into speech bubbles, and placing the words in the mouths of characters on the page, most of whom are fictional. We hope the original speakers will not mind, our sole aim has always been to make their voices heard.

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## Myanmar, the last stand

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